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ANNIS WARLEIGH'S
FORTUNES.

BY HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF

"SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "WARP AND WOOF,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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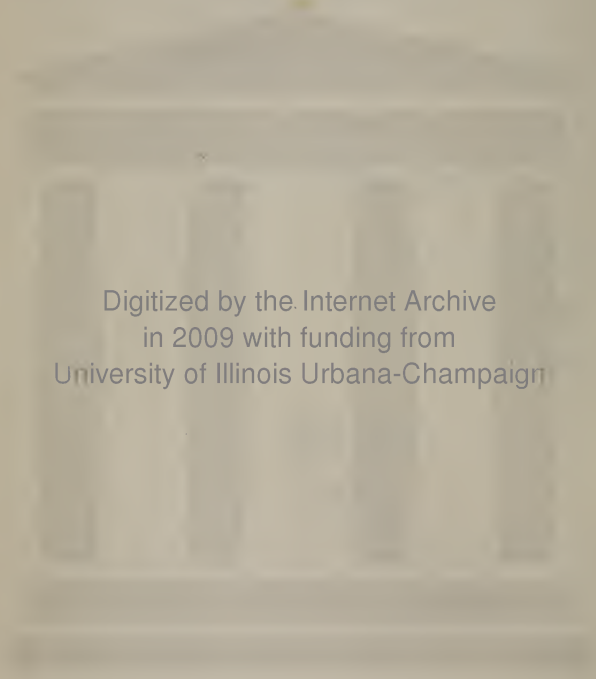
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ANNIS WARLEIGH'S FORTUNES.

PART FOURTH—*continued*.

SEEKING.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

SUSPICION BUDS AGAIN.

Foul deeds will rise though all the world o'erwhelm them.

SHAKSPEARE.

I.

It is true enough that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives. Carrie Martin's existence was a queer, practical commentary on the threadbare text of woman's rights and woman's wrongs. If she had been a man ever so, she could not have been happier, freer or more independent of

the world and its conventional ways than she was. The cheerful isolation of her habits would not have suited her friend Rachel Withers, but then Rachel had never had the same hardships to knead her out of the common mould of her sex. Here was Carrie in her bachelor-looking lodgings, alone for the most part; in the morning spinning her various webs; then to the reading-room of the British Museum in the exercise of her vocation; afterwards to dine in some pleasant company, for she was a person of many friends; and often of an evening on foot to the opera, where she doffed her bonnet, sat in a stall, forgot the work-a-day world in a revelry of music and walked home again without a doubt or a fear. Women are very different creatures hedged round with petting, care, and tender watchfulness, to what they become when set by fortune to stand alone, and help and keep and support themselves.

Carrie Martin had her lodgings now in the same house as the Oliver Warleights, and the owner of it was Mrs. Lupton. It was the house where Rachel had seen the Oliver Warleights during the year of the Exhibition, but Carrie had not been in it long. Their rooms were taken by the term, and always kept in readiness for them. They had the whole of the first floor, and Carrie was over them; her

apartments being at the back of the house for quietness' sake, and also for the broad glimpse of blue sky and green gardens she could get up there, better than below. It was a dreary neighbourhood, but she was satisfied with it; and here Rachel Withers visited her during the spring after her friends the Ferrands went abroad with Alice.

When Rachel heard the landlady's name it did not occur to her as familiar, but when she saw the woman she thought she possessed the most sleeky evil countenance she had ever beheld; and so she told Carrie, adding that if she lived in her house she should be afraid some night she should be murdered in her bed. Carrie only laughed and said she had never yet been worth murdering.

"But you are right in your antipathy to her face," she continued, "she is a suspicious character, and on that account she interests me. Also she is an admirable cook; she is very clean, and does not meddle with books or papers; she takes less toll off my coffee, sugar and wine than any landlady who ever experimentalized on my liberality before, and I give as little trouble as a single gentleman; so that, in fact, we are on excellent terms together. I have two ideas concerning her, and am now on the watch to prove which is the true one; she is either a member

of the female detective police, or else she is herself a criminal not yet found out.

"I would not stay here; I would go to some respectable common-place body without a mystery," said Rachel seriously.

"Not at all—why should I? I am safe, being on my guard, but safest as having nothing for her to covet. Besides she amuses me. She has had her adventures, and delights to expatiate on them. I feel it expedient sometimes to check her indiscretions of speech lest she should afterwards repent of her confidence, and become afraid of me; which, from her eye, *might* be dangerous. When she brings up our coffee after dinner I will set her going."

Rachel begged Carrie not to set her going for *her*, as she would greatly prefer dispensing with her society; but Carrie liked her own way, and when Mrs. Lupton appeared with the fragrant beverage, she detained her on one pretence or another until the restraint of Rachel's presence as a stranger wore off, and she followed her lodger's dexterous lead towards the ever self-interesting topic of her own remarkable sayings and doings. She appeared like a woman with a perfect digestion; her features were large and handsome, her skin healthy and blooming, but her long eyes were half closed and sly, and her

mouth was stretched into a perpetual smirk which became a grin when she was recounting an unpleasant story—and sooth to say, most of her stories were unpleasant. One very necessary caution she practised even while indulging her loquacity—she never mentioned names either of persons or of places.

“There are queer things in families, oh, very queer things!” cried she once, shaking her head and peering through her drooped eyelids as if she saw, and in imagination enjoyed, a long vista of calamities, the bringing about of which lay in her own immediate power. “If everybody had their own, there would be a deal of upsetting of them that are high and of lifting up of them that are low. Yes, as I say, if everybody only had their own!”

“A nurse has perhaps more opportunity of making acquaintance with private skeletons than anybody,” suggested Carrie, drawing her on.

“You are right ma’am. Somebody *must* be trusted, that is it. I never met the man or woman yet who could keep a bad secret to themselves, and not go mad or die under it. I was reading a word or two in a paper that was lying here on your table yesterday that went to prove how doctors were not likely to know much of the romance of life; bless the man that wrote it, thought I, it was never an

old doctor that told you *that* ! Why, doctors are confessors to us Protestants, and next to them come the lawyers ; and perhaps nurses and waiting-women are not far behind, only they're told of necessity often while things are in the acting ; and the doctors only hear the tale when the deed's done and past undoing, and misery begins to set in and break down the health. Now I knew a doctor once—and if I had any guilt on my conscience it is not *him* I would send for when I was dying—who could not keep a quiet tongue in his teeth, he didn't know what was harmless gossip he might amuse his patients with, and what was real tragedy that he had learnt as good as under seal of confession. It was about a pretty young widow with two boys who came to live in a country place where I was then in a very good service. My mistress was for calling on her, but first she must know a little of her belongings, and she asked our doctor who was attending on the stranger what he knew. He hummed and he hawed, and for that time he kept safe counsel ; the lady was desirous of living secluded, he said ; she was not well off and she had her two sons to bring up ; but she *was* a lady—oh ! yes, quite a lady of manners and education. So my mistress who was oldish and rich and fond of somebody new, called on her, and

they were getting quite to be friends. The widow had had her troubles, but being of a pious spirit she was slowly grieving down, as I heard my mistress say, when her doctor must needs blab how the poor young creature had told him in her very great agony when she first came to the town that the father of her children, her own husband that she'd once loved, had been *hanged*—hanged in Ireland something like a month before, and that for murder done in a drunken brawl. She had come away from all that knew her to hide their shame, and brought her sons where they might live to grow up and never hear of it. And what does her doctor do but tell my mistress, and she told me, and soon it was every body's secret. Then folks looked curious, or shy, or pitiful of the poor creature, and so she took her children and went away somewhere else—God knows where, but I never saw her after. And thinks I to myself, what mischief and misery more than there is, would there be in the world if nobody had any more discretion than our old doctor !”

Here Mrs. Lupton paused to take breath and apparently to angle in the dark depths of her memory for some other grotesque anecdote. She was not long in drawing one to the surface. “And speaking of persons coming wrongfully by what they hold, and

nurses knowing of their private skeletons," said she; "I remember once hearing of a nurse who took a temporary place with a very great lady who had charge of a child amongst her own that stood between her and money. Her husband hated the child, but he was one of them men that stop short, not for want of will but for want of courage, and the deed would never have been done but for his wife; and she got rid of her out of the country, making believe that she was dead who is alive this day. And that nurse *knew* it, she did, and some other folks *suspected* all was not right, but there was no stir made, and hasn't been yet, no, nor ever will be! But if that great lady could undo her doing now, oh! but she would; for things fell out so after, that she had no profit of it; not so much as to pay for keeping it dark. That nurse has told me she's seen her raging like a player on the stage. If she could make a compromise with God about it, that it should never be found out, but the wrong righted in some quiet, safe way, I do think she would be content to die the moment it was done! But there are them in it will hinder her. I've had a sort of pity for that lady ever since I heard it, for she is very high and proud in her ways and in her family. Ay, and I could tell you—" what more Mrs. Lupton could have

told them was lost for the present; for the street-door bell rang and she left the room.

“Mrs. Lupton is herself the nurse who assisted in that last little tragedy or I am very much mistaken,” remarked Carrie Martin. “She has told me the tale before but with variations. People should not meddle with lying unless they have excellent memories.”

Rachel was shocked and she began to ask her friend how she could endure to remain under such a woman's roof: but Carrie replied with a careless laugh that there was something everywhere to dislike, and that she preferred a mystery combined with exquisite cleanliness to other evils she had met with in London lodgings. She was never anywhere so comfortable before. “Besides,” added she; “I have not fathomed her character yet, and how can you expect me to leave my sport—it is all in the exercise of my vocation. Mrs. Lupton has her religious observances like the best of us, and who am I that I should say she is worse than her neighbours? It will not do to go about the world condemning people because they happen to have an unpleasant grin or a furtive look in their eyes. Your friends the Oliver Warleights treat her with great confidence, and she uses me honestly enough.”

"I don't care; I would not lodge in her house if I were you," persisted Rachel.

"Of course not—neither should I if I were as timid and ingrained with proprieties as you; but I am not. I have some acquaintances so eccentric you would think them ready for Bedlam. Come, dear old sober-sides, don't look so solemnly disapproving, but put on a black silk mantle over your black silk dress, and a bonnet that will not care for crushing, and let us go out and hear some music."

Rachel did not feel as if this were quite *proper* either, but to Carrie Martin it was a mere matter of custom; so she did as she was bidden, and they went to the Lyceum and heard Bosio, Mario and Ronconi in the *Barber of Seville*; and Rachel after all enjoyed it as much as if she had gone in full dress and under masculine escort. Carrie took a very practical view of woman's rights—especially of woman's right to enjoy herself, when she has achieved independence or had it thrust upon her. And not a sensible person of her acquaintance had ever thought she did other than wisely or esteemed her a groat the less for having courage to be happy in her own way.

II.

Rachel Withers had been only two days in town with her friend when the Oliver Warleights arrived to take possession of their apartments in Mrs. Lupton's house. They had been spending the winter at Brighton and were going down to Hurtleddale in a week or ten days. Rachel's presence seemed at first anything but acceptable to Lady Georgiana—everything that was unexpected was to her suspicious, she asked many questions about Carrie Martin, her condition and pursuits, but appeared satisfied with the answers given, and wound up her interrogation by saying she knew Mrs. Lupton's lodgings were popular; for she was a very careful, attentive person.

“We have the highest confidence in her skill and kindness,” she went on: “there is nobody Oliver likes to have about him so well as Mrs. Lupton when he has his worst attacks; and I greatly fear there is one lying in wait for him now. She was my nurse at that distressing time when Sir Laurence's poor little daughter died.”

“Your *nurse* was she?” said Rachel, vaguely; and the few trivial sounding words set her musing.

Lady Georgiana asked her what she was thinking of. "Nothing—I was not thinking—only Mrs. Lupton has a disagreeable face."

Lady Georgiana laughed at this and said Rachel was fanciful—the nurse was a very worthy creature, and the subject was permitted to drop.

On the following day Oliver Warleigh was taken ill as his wife had foreseen would be the case; his usual medical attendant, one Doctor Frith, was sent for and the whole house was disorganized. Something very grave seemed to be impending. Before the four-and-twenty hours were over Lady Georgiana looked terribly worn and haggard. She sought Rachel Withers' society, and made her the recipient of her trials and troubles.

"It is very wearing this frequent illness of Oliver's; I never know when I have him safe," said she pathetically. "I often think it would be best for us to settle permanently abroad; constant change is necessary to keep him in spirits, and that is more easily attainable there than here. You are going for a little tour with your friend Miss Martin, are you not? Shall you see them in Hurtledeale first?"

Rachel thought not; she proposed paying a visit to the rectory later in the year—in August or September.

“That is the pleasantest time on the moors,” said Lady Georgiana. “I dislike the Hurtlemere House myself, but Oliver has a strange hankering after it, as persons afflicted as he is often have for the places and people that, when in health and vigour they sought most to avoid. Mortimer is a dear good son to us; but for his promise to accompany us, I should hardly have courage to go. Once there, it will be for the whole long summer I am afraid. But we must spare my boy for one little holiday.”

Mortimer was, indeed, a kindly, gentle, tender-hearted fellow; there was something about him that it was impossible to help loving. At the first private opportunity, he asked Rachel how and where were all her Brookfall friends. She told him they were all well, and that they had just returned to Paris after wintering in Italy. She was not sure whither they were going next—whether to Switzerland or Germany. It was too early in the spring yet for Switzerland, Mortimer replied, but he wished he were on the wing thither; then added that it would be impossible for him to leave his mother while she was in so much anxiety about his father.

He looked anxious too, and when Rachel inquired if the present attack were serious, he said, “Yes,

very serious, and I do not think my father will ever be himself again until he has very different people about him. Mrs. Lupton may be a good nurse but she is distractingly watchful—Mr. Gilsland is not here or he would certainly have followed in Dr. Frith's wake. He has been obliged to betake himself to some hiding place abroad to secure himself from his creditors, and it is lucky for us he has. Then, as for Dr. Frith, I do not believe in him at all—I think he as often brings on the paroxysms as he alleviates them. He is a quackish little upstart with a German degree, but my mother is ready to swear by his skill. He can have no regular practice, for go where we may, he is always within hail. My mother is slavishly deferential to him, as women are to the physician who they fancy holds in his hands the power of life and death; but if I had a voice in the matter he would be immediately deposed in favour of some man of reputation; for that he is perfectly helpless in such a difficult and complicated case as my father's I have long been assured."

Rachel hereupon became rather curious to see this Dr. Frith, and to know who and what he was that Lady Georgiana should persist in trusting him when no one could perceive any beneficial results from his attendance on her husband. She had slightly

sprained her wrist a few days before leaving home, and domestic remedies had failed to reduce the swelling, so she made this an excuse for having him sent in to her the next time he came to the house; though Carrie mockingly said she could prescribe for her quite as well, and she should be glad of the fee.

When he came he proved to be a mean-visaged, pompous, shabby person, as unlike a family physician as possible. His surgical knowledge was trifling, but he used tremendously long words to make a show of more, though it needed but small discernment to set him down as a very ignorant and disreputable member of the profession he had usurped. Seen casually, he appeared an elderly man, but when Rachel came to talk with him over her maimed limb, she perceived that he could not be above forty, and that his grizzled hair was neither more nor less than a wig, and that his green spectacles were certainly worn either for purposes of disguise or for show of respectability, rather than for any use they could be of to the lynx-like eyes that glittered behind them.

Carrie Martin sat in her idle-time chair, critically considering him throughout the consultation, and when he was gone she exclaimed, "Rachel, that man is not only quack but rogue! Where can your

friends have picked him up? I would not let him prescribe for a sick dog of mine." Rachel said she did not know. "Humph!" returned Carrie, "I should say his practice has been chiefly colonial, and probably carried on at his country's expense. I never saw more legibly knavish characters on any face than on your family physician's, my dear."

The same day an opportunity occurred of introducing Dr. Frith's name before Lady Georgiana, when she spoke at once highly in his favour. There was no one in whom she felt so much confidence, she said, *no one*. Mortimer wished to have a second opinion on his father's case, but she could not insult Dr. Frith by showing such a distrust of his skill. He was, she added, the physician who had been called in at Hastings when Annis and Mortimer lay ill of the scarlet fever. For her own child she might have been satisfied with Mr. Blunt, the surgeon who attended her children on ordinary occasions, but for Sir Laurence's little daughter she had judged it expedient to have other advice. Rachel listened amazed—how could Frith have ever hoodwinked Lady Georgiana into the belief that he was a capable person? she thought. No wonder the child died, with Lupton for her nurse and that ignorant man for

her doctor—and in spite of herself Rachel's mind reverted to the old suspicions that had circulated round the event, and which Bittersweet had warned her against seeking to verify.

III.

As soon as Oliver Warleigh was fit to travel he went down to Hurtleddale with his wife and son, and Dr. Frith also in attendance. It was the doctor's first appearance at the Hurtleddale House, and it gave rise to much excitement there. Mistress Dobie told Mary Wray amongst other things that he had terribly violent scenes with his patient, and that Lady Georgiana seemed almost afraid of her life between them.

About a week after their arrival in the north, one morning immediately after breakfast, Lady Georgiana presented herself at the rectory to seek an interview with John Withers, for the purpose of soliciting him to lend her a sum of money which it was anything but convenient for him at the moment to spare. She begged him on no account to apprise Sir Laurence of her necessities, and vaguely intimated that it was Mortimer who had brought them upon her. John contrived to oblige her, but both he and his wife were

greatly perplexed by the excuse she made for her request.

“Mortimer extravagant—I will never believe it!” cried Katherine. “Give him leisure, sunshine, a pencil and a book, and he has enough to satisfy all his desires. Talking to me only yesterday in his indolent, earnest fashion he wished he were his father’s younger son that he might live obscurely at ease instead of having to prepare for the responsibilities of wealth.”

John replied: “But why should Lady Georgiana blame her son if the blame lies justly elsewhere?”

To this Katherine said she did not know, but that she was certain Mortimer was not the drain that kept his father and mother always poor; and while his defence was still hot in her mind an opportunity occurred of asking the young man himself how it was that they were constantly straitened.

“I cannot tell—where the money goes is as much a mystery to me as it is to you, aunt Kate,” was his prompt answer. “I never dream of interfering, but I conjecture that Frith is a great tax. It is costly work to carry a doctor about with you, is it not?”

Katherine believed so. She had never yet seen Dr. Frith; Lady Georgiana did not venture to intro-

duce him at the rectory ; but John had seen him and drawn certain inferences from his presence at the Hurtlemere House. When Lady Georgiana came down for that money, she looked like a woman with a great dread upon her ; he felt that she did not breathe freely under the doctor's incubus, though she professed to repose an entire confidence in him. She told John of her desire to live abroad, mentioning that Frith expressly forbade another removal for his patient. She said also that a nurse was then on her way down from town by his orders, and that the dreary probability was that they should remain in the dale through the summer. Her brother-in-law could only condole with her, deplore Oliver's unhappy condition and wish for her any change she desired.

The same evening the nurse arrived and proved to be Mrs. Lupton. The inferior woman-folk at the Hurtlemere House received her with marked disfavour, and the gossips whispered more shrewdly than ever.

"Mark my words—there's mischief brewing," said Mistress Dobie to another of her cronies. "Such a proud woman as Lady Georgiana does not go down on her knees to the like of that Doctor Frith for no small cause. There's a riddle 'ull be unriddled afore

long as will astonish some folks more than they reckon on. I can't abide this nurse as is just come; Oliver wants no nursing, none he; he wants letting alone; it is liker a *jailer* she is than a *nurse*. Bury a secret deep as you will but it'll come up green above ground sune or syne."

It was just at this time that Katherine drove over one brilliant spring day to Whinstane Tower to pay a duty visit to Lady Foulis. She took Sacharissa Tulip with her for company on the drive, and left her to amuse herself in the wilderness gardens while she mounted to the recluse's turret. Lady Foulis had now been bed-ridden for a year or more, but life was strong in her yet, and her mind retained such a fixed hold of certain ideas that it seemed as if it would never let them go.

From the first news of it she had refused to believe that poor little Annis was dead at Hastings, and had commonly made inquiries after her when Katherine paid her periodical visits; and though each time the same explanation and reminder of the child's death was given in reply to her questions, on the next occasion she repeated them as if she had never heard the story; and thus she did now.

"How is Sir Laurence's daughter, Kate, and

where is she?" she asked, abruptly in the midst of another subject.

Katherine tried gravely to recal to her memory how she had been repeatedly assured that the child was dead; but she retorted with acrid distinctness,—

"I know I have been repeatedly assured that she is dead, but that does not make it any the more true. Why do you go on believing in lies? Ask Lady Georgiana about her—she ought to be able to tell you. I had a dream of her last night—she is very beautiful and good though she is my namesake. When she comes home, bid Laurence bring her here to me."

Sacharissa Tulip found her mother very silent as they were driving home again. Katherine was thinking. The singular persistence of Lady Foulis in this delusion of little gipsy's being alive haunted her whether she would or no. Could there lurk a great crime under the wretchedness of Oliver and his wife? Many a moment of bewildering doubt and conjecture had gone over her as over others; could the words of that weird woman have been all along the clue to a dangerous fact which no one would accept from her?

That evening being alone with John she told him

what had passed at Whinstane Tower, and he no longer slighted Lady Foulis's assertion. Katherine looked at him pale and awe-stricken.

"Are you thinking she *may* be alive, John?" she asked in an almost inaudible whisper.

"The gossips are beginning to say so, Kate; suspicion is budding again, and there are many watchful eyes and ears about the Hurtlemere House," was his answer. "And there is food enough for them in all conscience."

"If she be alive, where is she? she must be almost a woman now," Katherine said.

"God knows—we do not. We are on the eve of a discovery and we can but wait," replied John. "Moral certainties are vain in such a case, but there is a mighty power in secrets to reveal themselves if we give them time. If there be any iniquitous fraud about the child's alleged death it is fast growing now out into the daylight."

"Oh, John, I pray it may be all a dream!" cried his wife infinitely distressed.

"I am afraid, my Katie, that it will prove a black and shameful truth. Patience and silence."

No fear that she would talk except to him! And thus suspicion reared again its darkling front and for every whisper of its tongue rose a fear and an agony

in the breasts of the guilty. Lady Georgiana walked about as much as ever, and greeted the cottagers with her old dignified grace, but she saw that one and another eyed her askance, and that the day of her reckoning with heaven was at hand.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

IN RHINELAND.

A work divine,
A blending of all beauties ; streams and dells,
Fruit, foliage, crag, wood, cornfield, mountain, vine.
LORD BYRON.

I.

CARRIE MARTIN loved the town, Rachel Withers loved the country ; Carrie loved the stir of the market-place, Rachel the solitude of hills and rivers, therefore it was a bargain before the friends started on their holiday tour that if Rachel stayed peaceably in Paris three weeks with her friend, her friend should afterwards spend three weeks with her in any district of fine scenery she selected. Rachel chose the Rhine valley, and thitherwards they travelled early in June, stopping a night at Strasbourg and then going forward to Heidelberg the next day. Rachel was delighted with the Neckar scenery and proposed remaining there a while. Just as you like,"

said Carrie, "one hill of vine-sticks is the same as another to me." And they subsided for a week into an inn close by the bridge; a cleanly, well-served, old-fashioned place where they were made comfortable in a homely way at very moderate charges.

On the further side of the river and about three hundred yards above the bridge, there was a walled-in orchard with a little garden-house abutting on the road, which had the prettiest garlanded window and balcony imaginable. A Virginian creeper twined its thousands of tendrilly sprays up the rustic pillars and waved from the roof in the most frolic and luxuriant of festoons. It was a picture of itself even now while the foliage was all one mass of vivid greenness, but when the finger of autumnal frost touched leaf by leaf into the wondrous crimson that is its dying array, it must have presented such an exquisite bit of form and colour as a painter might delight to carry away for a memorial of the lovely valley.

Its beauty and picturesqueness caught Rachel's fancy on the evening of their arrival when they strolled down by the river in the twilight for half an hour, before writing their home despatches to give notice of their whereabouts. It was solitary when they passed it first, but in returning they saw that it

was occupied by a young man and a girl whose heads were drawn together in whispering intimacy and confidence. Carrie, who had as quick an eye for a germ of romance as for any other mystery, immediately suggested "lovers," and the wreathed balcony was forthwith flowered over with her fantastic speculations concerning the pair. Rachel, believing Carrie very possibly correct in her surmises, dipt her hat as they went by and forbore to look up. Having invested it with so tender an interest, the next evening they looked out from their window to see if the pair were there again, watching the sunset and the moonrise, and speaking low as the fashion of lovers is. They were, but with them was a lady whom Carrie set down at once as elderly and English, for she wore a bonnet that was never constructed save by a provincial milliner of her own country with a sedate, grey-haired single gentlewoman in prospect. Rachel took these particulars on hearsay; she was not long enough sighted to discover them for herself; but her curiosity to know who the strangers were was excited, and the following day the discovery was made to her very great satisfaction.

They were loitering inn-wards weary and thirsty after a long day's wandering on the wooded hills, when just as they were approaching the garden-house

of the wall, out came their two young lovers upon the balcony. To glance up was irresistible; to recognize Sinclair Ferrand and Alice was the affair of a moment, and their exclamations of welcome and astonishment were simultaneous with Rachel's own.

"*You* here, Rachel Withers!" cried Alice leaning down towards her in eager greeting. "Oh! what a godsend you will be to aunt Delia—somebody new to explode to! Come in, do come in! Sinclair has gone down to open the garden-door!" And there he was already, standing with it wide and looking by several degrees browner and cheerier than he did when he left England in charge of the travelling party eight months before.

It was impossible to resist the temptation of familiar faces so far away from home; therefore tired, dusty, faint, as they were, in they went; through the orchard, across a little lawn strewn with plots of beautiful flowers, and up a shallow flight of stone steps into a pretty room where sat Dr. Ferrand with a book, Miss Flora with her knitting, and Miss Delia with her basket of busy idlenesses, precisely as they might be found sitting any three hundred nights in the year in their own houses at Claymire.

"Eh, what, Rachel Withers dropt from the clouds!" cried the doctor, who was the first to realize

her as a fact ; and then the two old ladies clasped their hands, kissed her, rejoiced over her and asked more questions in a breath than she could have answered by morning. As soon as a pause ensued, Carrie Martin was made known to them ; then they were told where the two friends were staying ; and as no entreaties moved the aunts to release either until the morning, Alice convoyed them upstairs for a refreshing, and half an hour after they were all assembled at a banquet made as English as possible with excellent strong tea, up-heaped dishes of fragrant Alpine strawberries and delicious bread and butter.

Of course then there was great effusion of chat ; and Carrie, by reason of her non-acquaintanceship till now being almost useless for conversational purposes, had leisure to make mental notes on all the party and especially on her charming young lovers. Not much serenity was to be expected from Miss Delia after the sudden break-up of their family circle, and she made haste to put her guests to the use for which Sunshine had so simply said they would serve. Her tongue went incessantly in praise, in blame, in depreciation or in pious horror of the strange and wonderful things they had witnessed in their travels. They had been in Heidelberg since the middle of

May, thankful to escape out of "heathenish Paris," whence they came last by way of Strasbourg, stopping two nights at the Maison Rouge to rest. This news made an opening amongst generally interesting topics, of which Carrie, who abhorred silence, boldly availed herself, striking in with an opinion that the cathedral of that ancient fortified town was the finest of all the Gothic churches she had yet seen; an opinion which caused both the old ladies to wave the head of most earnest dissent.

"I could not give my thoughts to the edifice," sighed Miss Flora; "for there on his knees was a labouring man, saying his prayers to a recumbent image and kissing, yes, positively *kissing*, the senseless hands and feet and breast in adoration!"

"And I observed that, stone though it be, it is *worn* with the repetition of that act of worship," added Miss Delia shuddering. "Oh, it is melancholy to reflect on such utter darkness and absence of gospel light! I have not enjoyed one happy Sunday since we left Claymire, but certainly that at poor Strasbourg was the worst."

Sinclair Ferrand rather wickedly suggested that perhaps that might be because there was something wrong about aunt Delia herself—"a lack of sympathy

for instance—but Carrie Martin subsided into silence before the Protestant demonstration; and knowing her taste and her temper, Rachel had reason to be glad she refrained from proclaiming herself something dreadfully heterodox on the spot, for the perverse pleasure of mystifying her new acquaintance. The doctor good-humouredly attempted to discuss the building with her on architectural rather than doctrinal grounds, but Carrie felt she had fallen into dangerous society, where her independence would not be appreciated or respected; and she kept such discreet watch over her words as deprived them of all their usual flavour and piquancy. She had been shuffled about the world through many reverses, and had seen most civilized varieties of men, women and books, and the result of her experiences had been to make bigotry—or what she supposed to be such—her favourite aversion.

“We spent Christmas in Rome, and a truly penitential season it was to me,” said Miss Delia by-and-by. “The young ones arranged the tour, and we have patiently followed our leaders, though I know we might often economize distance and be less frequently on the road.”

Rachel inquired if Sinclair had been with them all the time.

“Oh, no, not one half of it!” cried Alice. “He leaves us planted somewhere and goes off on independent expeditions with only a knapsack and a walking-stick.” Sunshine looked as if she too would like to be off on independent expeditions with only a knapsack and a walking-stick; especially when Sinclair observed a minute or two after that he thought he should be away to Heilbronn on the morrow. And the following morning, he having started before six o’clock on a tramp up the valley as he had said, Alice brought her sunshine to the inn where Rachel and her friend were staying, and spent a lazy day with them out on the hills fern-gathering and wild-flower hunting.

Alice was in her lightest, gayest mood that morning. Blithe as a bee or heedless as a butterfly. She was very fluent of speech also, and had a thousand little adventures of her travels to tell; and Carrie having incautiously availed herself of her firm right arm to help herself up an abrupt steep, was not suffered to relinquish it again, but was obliged to be dependent for the rest of the ramble. Rachel could perceive that her old friend was amused by this peremptory assistance, and that she was endeavouring to draw Alice out several times. But draw her out as she would, there was never word or sentence

elicited that could produce so much as a momentary regret. Even when Alice's sense of fun beguiled her into some arch comment on the aunts, she immediately qualified or effaced it by an affectionate ejaculation. She should be quite sorry to go home, she said, though Claymire was pretty in its way—in fact, like everybody else of her age and temper, she revelled in change and excitement.

“It is delightful to travel about,” cried she, in a glow of enthusiasm. “I always feel as if something new and wonderful were going to happen—it does *not*, but there is the *expectation*. The world has lovely bits in it! The marvel to me is that while our time in it is so short, we content ourselves with seeing the little we do. Auntie Dee protests daily against the weariness of packing up and moving on, and in the most beautiful scenes bears herself with obtrusive resignation—no, I ought not to say that; for she is very patient, really, and it is hard to look gratified when we are expected to enjoy what we don't care about. But I never watch Sinclair setting out as he did to-day, with his knapsack strap on his back, and his stick in his hand, that I do not think how much more delightful it must be to be a man than a woman, and long to throw my girlishness by and be off too.”

“And you would be off too, did not the proprieties and Auntie Dee forbid,” said Carrie, laughing.

Once during that day when they were lying down to rest in the shade, Alice with her hat off, her russet brown hair blown about and her cheeks richly flushed, her likeness to the old portrait at Woodlands was marvellous. She was very beautiful and growing lovelier every day; there was a grace and a charm of animation about her that are most rare; but her fascination would not have been half so great had there been no latent power, no passion underlying the sparkling airiness of her sunny-day moods.

“I like your young friend very well in her beaming moments, but I shall not be satisfied unless I see her in a storm,” said Carrie when Alice had left them and gone home.

“Most likely she will give you the opportunity if we meet often,” was Rachel’s quiet reply. “She is never long the same.”

Nor was she. If inquiry had been made of Miss Delia she would have borne testimony to her capriciousness with great unction.

On their first Sunday at Heidelberg, directly after breakfast, Carrie and Rachel went up to the castle, and while seated on the terrace they saw Sinclair Ferrand and Alice walking together alone; their

parents and guardians not having chosen to surmount the difficulties of the steps and the hill before going to the English service as they had had courage to do.

"Look at them," said Carrie; "they are unconscious of everybody but themselves and each other. Ah! now they have espied us, and are coming this way. Turn your head straight, Rachel, and don't see them; perhaps, then, they will fancy themselves unobserved."

Rachel did as she was bidden and stared resolutely into the air; but there was no double-dealing about Alice or Sinclair, and in a few moments they arrived, and in the most disinterested manner, if they *were* lovers, gave the friends the pleasure of their company as long as they remained on the terrace.

In the evening Rachel and Carrie joined the doctor's party by request, and sat all in the pretty garden-house together, with the window open looking on the river. The doctor read them a sermon there, and after it was over they were free to talk and to stroll about the orchard. Alice had dug up in the woods and on the hills a basket of beautiful ferns, which she was proposing to carry away with her on their further travels: "Until," said Sinclair, "they all die at the top, when she will throw the

roots away, as she has done a score of times before," and foreseeing but a short life for them under any circumstances, he broke off several of the longest fronds, and put them with a bit of scarlet geranium for a drooping ornament in Alice's hair. Miss Flora said, "It was not right on a Sunday," but beyond that no remark was made, except by Carrie, who telegraphed Rachel a significantly triumphant glance, and afterwards declared that none were so blind as those who would not see—herself implied; for Rachel had not quite agreed with her friend that the two were what she said.

"If they love and marry it will be a perfect little idyll, but they have been companions ever since Alice was a baby child of five or six years old, and I am not sure they are more than friends now," said she, humouring Carrie's fancy, but still retaining her own private doubts.

That Sinclair had set his heart on Sunshine she firmly believed; but an incident of that Sunday evening gave her reason to think Sunshine's vagrant dreams floated far away from him. She mentioned Mortimer Warleigh's name in common incidental talk, and a soft, tell-tale rose blushed all over her face in a moment. Alice was a mystery to her about Mortimer; she had seemed attracted by him in

one sense and in another quite indifferent. All Rachel's aspirations were for Sinclair—that brave, constant, single-hearted lover whose love was not of one sudden spring's growth but of many years. It did not seem that the aunts had found out his secret yet or that he had told it. Nor did the doctor make any sign. Alice and he went their own way, companions as much as ever, and were still “the children” in the elder folks' eyes.

II.

The next morning Rachel had a letter from Hurdendale, some part of the contents of which she read aloud to Miss Delia Ferrand, who always liked to hear pleasing news of her friends' friends. Mortimer Warleigh had come abroad to meet his uncle Sir Laurence, with whom he had spent a fortnight in the Tyrol, and they were now both at Munich, entranced amongst works of art. A little while after she had read these passages from the letter, Rachel saw Alice diligently studying her travelling map, and she suspected it was for the purpose of coaxing Munich into the way home; but when Rachel looked over her shoulder she quietly folded it up, and met her questioning eyes with a perfectly frank ingenuous-

ness. Alice had a true reticence; a power of keeping her thoughts, hopes, fears, feelings to herself, be they where they might; and her gesture conveyed to Rachel an unmistakeable intimation that this girl, childlike as she was, had depths of character which were not idly and curiously to be pryed into.

That evening she parted with Carrie and herself on her way with her aunts and the rest to Frankfort. The good-by was only for a little while, however, as they were sure to meet again somewhere in their passage down the Rhine. And they did meet again at St. Goar. Rachel and her travelling-companion had come down from Bingen in the broad shining afternoon, and as they walked from the landing-place to the "Lily," they heard a familiar voice exclaim, "Here they are," and looking up saw Sinclair Ferrand in the balcony over the inn-door, and Alice just rushing out at the window to verify his report with her own bright eyes.

"So glad to see you again!" cried she, nodding her head as they stood below; "we came from Rudesheim this morning."

And then they marched up-stairs and found the doctor and the worthy aunts, and were all extremely delighted to meet once more, though it was scarcely a week since they parted at Heidelberg. There was

an interchange of gossip and adventures for half an hour, then a rest; and in the cool of the evening a leisurely stroll by the river with an English tea in the Ferrands' apartments afterwards. Miss Delia was, as usual, highly conversational; all the more cheerfully so, perhaps, because she began to see a term to her toilsome pleasure—which she peremptorily insisted on everybody understanding had not been a pleasure at all, but rather a prolonged penance.

“We are drawing nearer home I hope every day,” said she, late in the evening, when drowsiness was stealing visibly over her. “Oh! yes, I hope so! And truly, truly thankful shall I be when I set foot on English soil once more. I tell the children they will never prevail on me to come abroad again; I have had enough of sight-seeing to last me my lifetime, and it is a matter of sincere congratulation to me that there are no museums, picture-galleries or fine churches to be visited on this part of the Rhine; for I am heartily weary of them. I can put up with the natural beauties, but I do not intend to fatigue myself by making one more excursion until I walk down from Brookfall to the school at Claymire; and, therefore, Sunshine, you need not think to beguile me by putting on your coaxing airs.”

“I am almost of your mind, sister,” added Miss Flora in her gentler way; “we cannot keep pace with young folks now.”

The doctor glanced up at them over his spectacles and newspaper, and suggested prayers, wine and water, and bed—a suggestion that was taken in perfectly good part and acted on by both the old ladies; while Alice, whose room was next to Rachel’s and Carrie’s, came to talk off a little of her superfluous spirits with them before committing herself to rest. All through the evening she had looked a picture of light-heartedness; she was not tired, bless her, the world was far too new to her for that, and besides something had happened. This something was that they had seen Mr. Mortimer Warleigh in the morning—only for a moment when the boat stopt at Bacharach, and not to speak to, but they had exchanged a recognition from the distance, all of them. Alice now communicated this bit of intelligence to Rachel, who thought it rather significant that the incident had not been referred to by any of the party below, though, of course, her interest in him was very well known to all of them.

Rachel had had another letter from Hurtleddale that day, giving an alarming account of Oliver Warleigh’s state of health, and this she now told

Alice, expressing some surprise that Mortimer was not hurrying home—supposing always that the bad news had reached him. “Oh, I should think it has not, or he would never delay,” replied Alice. “I am sure he would never delay; for he has a good heart.” This was the first word Rachel had ever heard her utter in his favour or otherwise. “He has a good heart,” said she, and so kissed Rachel and went away quickly, forgetting Carrie, who was listening by the open window to the Echo Serenade.

“Oh, the little barbarian!” cried she, when she became aware of the neglect. “So she is gone. Has she been quarrelling with her tawny lover? he looked more or less thundery all the evening.”

Rachel had fancied so too, but she had laid the gloom to the rencounter with Mortimer Warleigh, and the probability of his turning up at St. Goar on the morrow, rather than to any fault of Sunshine's.

III.

The next morning when Rachel and her companion went down into the long room to breakfast, there at the top of the table by the open window sat Mortimer Warleigh, himself as fresh as the morning, conning

his letters, a sheaf of which lay on a plate before him. The sound of their entrance caused him to lift his head, when he immediately sprang up and shook hands with Rachel, expressing the pleasure and surprise that a chance meeting elicits from most persons—not that there was very much *chance* about it, however; for he had learnt from his mother that Rachel and the Ferrand party were all to and fro somewhere in Rhineland. Greetings exchanged, Rachel made haste to ask him the latest news from the Hurtlemere House.

“This letter that I was reading when you came in is from my mother,” was his reply, and he turned the document in his hand, glancing down the page as he spoke. After a moment’s pause he went on, “My father has taken a sudden turn towards recovery, and she begs me not to hurry home, and to intercept Sir Laurence if I can; but I do not know where he is just now, for it is a week since we parted; perhaps her own letters may reach him somewhere or else aunt Kate’s. I had news from her two days ago at Heidelberg that moderated my anxiety a little, and she wishes me not to cut short my holiday, but I shall make my way home very soon nevertheless.”

“Then you have lately come from Heidelberg?” said Rachel. A delicate colour suffused his face as

he answered, yes—it was a nice old town. Naturally he was asked if he had stayed there long. Only one night, he replied, and the ingenuous blush deepened. Mortimer was no actor! If he had been inquired of why he was here now, he would probably have said because his mother had sent him.

Breakfast being now brought in, they seated themselves in a group and prolonged the meal with traveller's talk. Mortimer glanced up hurriedly each time the door opened to see who entered; and good-natured Rachel, knowing well for whom he watched, amiably took occasion to observe by-and-by that though their friends the Ferrands were at the inn—as perhaps he was aware—they did not come into the public room of a morning, but breakfasted in their own apartments. Just at that moment, as if for the purpose of contradicting her, appeared the doctor, followed by Sinclair and there was a renewal of civilities.

“I see you have tasted the freshness of the morning,” said the doctor.

“Yes; I came down by the earliest boat from Bacharach,” replied Mortimer.

Sinclair was not disposed to conversation; but his father added cheerfully that if Mortimer Warleigh were remaining at the “Lily,” he hoped they should

have the pleasure of seeing him again during the day ; he then took a newspaper and two letters from the post-box, and left the room, when his son, as if suddenly smitten with the propriety of being more courteous, invited Mortimer to join him by-and-by in a walk up the beautiful so-called Swiss Valley across the river. The proposal was accepted with the greatest apparent satisfaction, and that being agreed on, Sinclair followed his father, leaving the other three to continue their interrupted chat. It struck Rachel Withers at once that her friend Sinclair had meaning in his manœuvre ; and so it presently turned out. She had heard no talk of any excursion up the Swiss Valley on the previous evening, and when she paid her morning respects with Carrie to Miss Flora and Miss Delia she found that the arrangement included neither the doctor nor his sisters, nor even Sunshine. Palpably, therefore, Sinclair's object was to carry Mortimer Warleigh out of Alice's way—a deep design, perhaps, if she had not been bent on circumventing it, but as the event proved, in this instance, shallow exceedingly.

Mortimer was with the Ferrands' family party, quite at home and happy, when Rachel and Carrie went in ; his hands being at the moment occupied

in holding a skein of white lambswool which Miss Delia was busy winding. The doctor had his newspaper, Miss Flora her Bible, and Sinclair his Murray, while Alice with the slightest gathering of cloud on her brow was asking in a voice of reproachful remonstrance, "Why may I not go up the Swiss Valley with them, auntie Dee?"

"Because, my love, you did rather too much the last time you went on an expedition without *us*, and were quite ill after it," answered Miss Delia with prompt decision.

"I was tired to start then, but I am not tired now—*may* I go?" persisted the wilful damsel in a more urgent tone.

"Your aunt Delia said no, Sunshine," interposed the doctor; and there the discussion would probably have been at an end had not Mortimer put on a comically pathetic face and pleaded for her: "We could carry her between us if her legs fell short;" that expression of legs falling short being Alice's old excuse for not going farther than she wished when she was a baby-thing.

Everybody laughed but Sinclair and Alice herself, who immediately asked, "Who told you that saying of mine?"

"No one—is it a saying of yours? So it is of my

sister Clara's too," replied he. "She uses it still when she fancies herself overdriven; in that we are both indolent alike."

The skein of lambswool was now reeled off, and the holder was at liberty to depart. Sinclair made the first move.

"Come," said he, "the morning is getting on; we had better start." Mortimer glanced round to the spot where a minute before Alice had been standing, but she had disappeared; so without more loitering or ado the two young men went off together.

When Sunshine vanished it was only out upon the balcony, where she ensconced herself to watch the boat that would carry Sinclair and Mortimer across the river. Miss Delia being in some displeasure with her for her persistence obtrusively refrained from noticing her; but Carrie Martin, whose beguiling tones would sometimes almost melt the hardness out of a flint, addressed herself to the task of comforter; but not, as it proved, with her usual success. Alice fretted and fumed under her taming—or teasing—artifices, and finally escaped them on pretence of writing a letter, which she left unfinished that she might mend a glove, in its turn dropt that she might seek the doctor who had quitted the room soon after his son; and thus it came to pass that they all lost

sight of her for several hours; that they sought her in the house and round the house and could find her nowhere. When they saw her next it was positively with Sinclair and Mortimer, coming up from the landing place for the boats; and her guilty, half-defiant expression of countenance betrayed in a moment that the wilful young thing had had her own way in spite of her aunts and the doctor.

"Where have you been all this while, Alice? we have felt quite uneasy about you," Miss Delia said suspiciously as she appeared.

"It is all right, aunt Delia—she has been with us," replied Sinclair, in a tone meant to cut discussion short.

"We espied her wandering disconsolate by the river and turned back for her," added Mortimer. "We hope to be forgiven our disobedience this time; she is not over-fatigued, as you may see."

No, she did not look over-fatigued, nor yet, though she had had her walk up the valley, did she look perfectly happy after it. Miss Delia would have felt herself neglecting a duty had she not delivered herself of a rebuke or two, and this, being really vexed, she did with so much coldness, that poor Alice never spoke once during dinner and ate like a mere sparrow, grieving her aunts more and more. And

when evening came she had what Miss Delia called one of her *moods*.

The women folk had returned to the salon after dinner, leaving the three gentlemen to their conversation and pipes below, when Alice went out into the balcony by herself and there remained, silent and solitary. Miss Flora suggested that she should be let alone, whispering that the low fit would have its time; and then they fell to talking of other things and almost forgot her until the Echo Serenade drew them out into the twilight to listen. She had gathered herself up into a corner of the balcony and took no notice of any of them until Rachel, thinking to rouse her, put an arm round her shoulders, and made some indifferent remark on the soft beauty of the evening. Alice was leaning her face downwards, and suddenly by the falling of a scalding drop on her hand which rested before her on the balustrade, Rachel found out that she was crying—and tears from Alice were a most rare and singular effusion.

“Don’t, don’t,” she sobbed, and turned so determinedly away from any attempt at consolation that Rachel judged it expedient to follow Miss Flora’s advice, and let her alone in her *mood*. Soon after she left her retreat, and kissing her aunts told them she was going to bed. No remonstrance was raised;

only Miss Flora said, "Yes, my darling; you have over-exerted yourself to-day, and a long sleep will do you good," but as soon as she disappeared the tender-hearted old lady added with a sigh: "I should not be surprised if that child cried through half the night."

"What began it? Did anybody speak to her beside myself? She never frets for *my* scoldings," said Miss Delia visibly aggrieved. "What can it be that brings on these extraordinary paroxysms of distress?"

"It is of no use to speculate," responded Miss Flora. "It is a mystery of nature, but I did hope they were over and done with now. Mr. Wilson used to assure us she would grow out of her delusions, but they are more fixed than ever!"

"She is an interesting study," here observed Carrie Martin, "there is a very strange look in her eyes at certain moments."

"What do you mean, my dear? We have seen nothing peculiar in them unless it be their beauty," said Miss Flora with an animation bordering on affront.

Carrie made haste to explain.

"They are beautiful eyes," answered she; "very beautiful—dreamy and loving one moment and all

caprice and sparkle the next. But the expression I mean never struck me so forcibly in any face as it does now and then in hers—it is the puzzled, painful, far-away, *seeking* gaze of some one striving vainly to *remember*.”

“She is full of fancies, poor pet; full of unaccountable fancies,” said Miss Flora sympathetically; “but we always entreat that they may not be commented on to herself. We attach as little importance to them as possible ourselves; for we find they vanish soonest when not reasoned upon. She will be herself again to-morrow.”

This closed the conversation; for the doctor and Sinclair appearing, they inquired for Alice, and being told that she was gone tired to bed, prayers were read and the rest followed her example. Carrie Martin with her knowledge of psychology and her habits of shrewd observation had however laid her hand upon a fact. There was a chord in Sunshine’s memory that had begun after long silence to vibrate anew, as she felt darkly along it to discover by what it hung. Unconsciously even to herself, it hung by Mortimer Warleigh, and a chance word from him would set it painfully thrilling. As her heart grew and ripened, the thought of her father in the core of it became more real and living to her than ever;

and she had no one—*no one* to whom she might utter it! Even Sinclair, dear Sinclair, who loved the very ground she walked on, and set a value even on her shoe-tie, rallied her over *that*, and tried to laugh her out of it as a delusion. For all her seeming joy and happiness there was often a heavy groundswell of sorrow and unsatisfied yearning below the sunny flow of the deep waters; and notwithstanding all discouragements both from within and from without her faith never wavered. She held her peace, but when she appeared most to have forgotten perhaps then she remembered the best.

The next day she was very quiet and silent after her mood of passionate gloom; she looked tired, restless, uneasy; but it was safest to leave her to herself those said who knew her best; if she spoke at all it would be to Sinclair, and of her own accord; but for the present she seemed intent on nothing so much as on the avoidance of everybody—Sinclair not excepted. Miss Delia had a conversation with Rachel Withers about her *protégée* during that morning's walk, which interested her exceedingly. She had never before heard any particulars of the poor child's recovery from that illness, brought on by cruelty, cold, and exposure which ensued on her adoption into the household at Brookfall; for it was

not a subject that her benefactresses were fond of reviving. Indeed Miss Delia now confessed that it had been their endeavour from the first to obliterate all traces of a painful past from the child's memory. She was discouraged from speaking of the period before she escaped from Welsbeck or of any former recollections at all; and as a very young memory is not tenacious of *names* or of anything but what may be styled picture-events, most of what had befallen her before she was put into the charge of Mr. Gilsland and his wife was undoubtedly lost. But one fixed idea, Miss Delia acknowledged, she had retained for years; indeed, she was sure that in her secret heart she had not relinquished it even yet; and this was that her father, for whom she was in mourning when Sinclair found her on the down and brought her to Brookfall, was not dead.

"It was for her obstinate persistence in this denial that Mrs. Gilsland had beaten her," Miss Delia said as she told her tale. "It is a long while ago and many things begin to slip my memory; but my strong impression is that the poor little innocent was ill-used for asserting that her dear papa was alive in spite of all Mr. Gilsland's solemn assurances to the contrary. Sunshine's ways were no doubt very provoking, but it was not a very sagacious means

they adopted to drive out her belief; for it ended by stamping it on her heart indelibly. Years after when Flora and I were speaking to her of God and the future life, reminding her of her dear father and mother gone before her to Heaven, we were deeply grieved to hear her murmuring to herself: "All the same, papa is *not* dead;" though she never openly braved us with the assertion as she did the Gilslands. When she has her moods now it is that idea, I am persuaded, that is at the foundation of them; and most distressing it is; for such a strong and steady delusion amounts almost to monomania; and for all we can see it increases upon her."

"It never occurred to you, did it, Miss Delia, that Alice might have right and reason for what she believed?" said Rachel on the inspiration of the moment. Miss Delia looked at her as if she thought she too might have taken leave of her senses.

"My dear Rachel, I did not expect to hear such an absurd question from you," was her reply. "Of course, it never did! How should it? I do not read romances to pervert my judgment of facts. I take all things for what they are."

Rachel held her peace; and felt almost ashamed of her suggestion.

IV.

The next day there was arranged an exploring party over the hills beyond the Castle, including everybody but Miss Delia, who kept to her word of going on no more excursions, and was apparently quite satisfied to be left in the company of her knitting, her miscellaneous work-basket, and her good book. The party was provided with a baggage donkey to carry the luncheon, and with two supernumeraries for anybody to mount who might fall tired by the way—Miss Flora and Carrie Martin implied ; but even they started on foot like the rest.

In the golden prime of the morning they set out. It was the beginning of one of those days when old folks feel young again, and young ones ought to doubt whether there be any pain, grief, misery, wickedness in a world so fair. The gossamer sparkled on the low bushes, and the dew in the shady nooks about them, while overhead the sky shone, one calm, cloudless expanse of blue. And withal there was a stir in the air as of innumerable wings—wings of zephyrs that cooled deliciously the rosy-cheek of Midsummer, which but for their gentle fanning must have blazed in a sultry languor of blushes ere noon.

Alice was not quite sunshiny, but it was clearer weather with her than it had been for two days past. She quietly possessed herself of Sinclair's arm, and Mortimer Warleigh joined them, with or without a welcome. Then the doctor lent his sister his aid in mounting the hill, while Carrie and Rachel strolled after; the donkeys bringing up the rear.

"You may think what you like, Rachel," suddenly began her companion as they followed some twenty paces behind Alice and her two friends; "but that child and Sinclair Ferrand are profoundly and inseparably attached to each other. Look how unconsciously she applies to him, now she has come to herself again as if she had gotten to her rest. You fancy she has a budding tenderness for that beautiful young Warleigh, and there is a strain of caprice in her manner that might mislead him too, but it does not mean *love*. I should be angry with her if she could prefer him to her tawny lion—he is a noble fellow."

"Well," replied Rachel long since unsettled in her opinions by Carrie's persistence; "I wish you may be right. Sinclair has served for her these twelve years, and there is no question as to which would love her most constantly."

"Nor which is best worth loving. He has a

poetical, gentle character, that Mortimer, but he has no courage, no fortitude to boast of. He dreams of his wishes,—for they are too weak to be called desires, and too indistinct to be called hopes—and in a little while they fade out before him like roseate reflections of clouds in water. Let him be ever so rich—and I by no means despise rank and wealth—it would not be a white day for Alice if she won him. What is it that haunts her imagination and makes her always of such an uncertain and divided mind, Rachel?”

The question came upon Rachel too unexpectedly to be fenced off with skill; Alice’s delusions were not explained by her benefactresses to indifferent persons, and Rachel knew that they preferred them to be as little known as possible; so she hesitated, stammered and ended by evading the inquiry with a pretence that she did not know what Carrie meant. Carrie saw through her feeble fiction and immediately added: “Oh, never mind; I had no right to ask. But it is so much my habit to observe that I cannot for the life of me help seeing how, beyond and above all daily pleasures and pains, the child has some vision that holds her in a capricious bondage. Her heart is half its time pondering over a mystery, dim and hard to interpret. She has a secret hope and expectancy; and often when no one is watching her, and

she seems idly dreaming in the sun or revelling in the sweet air, she is looking and straining out to catch this film of fancy—or it may be of fact—which floats always just beyond her reach.”

“It never occurred to me that you were a witch before, Carrie!” exclaimed Rachel laughing, but surprised at her penetration.

“Witch, nonsense!” repeated Carrie. “I can add this and that together. I have heard the story of her adoption at Brookfall from Mary Cornwell, and it is my opinion and always was that she is no more akin to Mr. Gilsland than you are. Mary thought so too. You see, Rachel, I am not afraid of speaking out.”

“Pray, don’t speak out to anybody else!” cried Rachel. “It would do far more harm than good; if you *will* have it,—that is Alice’s own delusion. But no one regards it besides. Do be discreet, Carrie, and hold your peace here.”

“So be it; let us talk of something else,” rejoined her companion; and sheering off from personal matters altogether, she began to speak of a new German novel she was reading. But what she had said before sank into Rachel’s mind.

They were walking along a winding road betwixt open fields that waved luxuriant with corn; the flower was off the wheat, the ears were full, and the

sun had given them the first pale tinge that a few weeks would enrich to a deep golden brown. It was a wide expanse, with hills of dun violet hue in the distance: a lovely scene at any season, but at this the loveliest. On the right the fields were fringed with wood growing up a steep; and as they went farther, the road bending towards it, they looked down upon a sweet curve of a narrow secluded valley. Round and round whirled a great mill-wheel in the dazzling sunlight below, the diamond spray flying from it in showers, and the whirr, whirr, floating up to where they stood with a softened, pastoral rhythm.

“If we could get down into that valley!” suggested Mortimer Warleigh, smitten by its peaceful charm.

That did not seem impossible. Indeed, twice since they set out on their wanderings they had observed cart-roads across the fields to the wood, which no doubt led down into the glen if followed far enough; so they went on and on; sometimes leaning away from it as the road leant, then wending back to it again, until they reached a farm and a green meadow dotted with trees—the advance-guard of a thick copse that extended before them with the highway running through it. Oh! the cool shadow and pleasantness of it when they struck in under the dense foliage; and the donkeys being tethered with

enough grazing freedom, they all sat down in a group to rest.

"City life for those who like it, but give me liberty and sylvan delights!" exclaimed Mortimer Warleigh, and stretched himself at ease under a spreading tree.

Opposite to him was Alice leaning against a mossy hillock, her hat in her lap, and her waved brown hair uncovered. Rachel could not help watching her and meditating on Carrie Martin's strange suggestions. She was not talkatively inclined, and to judge from the perplexed gravity of her face, before they had been seated five minutes she was sunk in a deep reverie; her mind going step by step through some slow process of thought. This mood was better than her passionate one, but it was not quite the most suitable mood in which to go a-gipsying.

"Wake up, Alice," cried the doctor once in his stirring tones, but though her eyes did lift themselves vaguely for a moment they were immediately down on the grass again and veiled in mute meditation. Miss Flora intimated that she was not to be teased, and for the next half-hour she might have been asleep for any sign of wakefulness she showed; though the doctor, Mortimer, Carrie and the rest

got into an animated talk about pastoral poets and poets in general, which at another time would have been silvered with her liveliest prattle; for Sunshine had a very pretty taste in poetry and in all works of imagination and fancy.

When they struck their tents to journey on, Miss Flora and Carrie after a few modest excuses, availed themselves of the donkeys that had followed in their train, with a view to their falling tired by the way; and Alice slid her hand under Rachel's arm, whispering her to come on in advance, which she submissively did, all unwitting of the entertainment preparing for her. When they had gained about a couple of hundred yards before the rest of the party Alice said without the slightest circumlocution,

"Don't talk to me, Rachel; I want to *think*."

"You have hurried me out of breath, so that I could not talk if I would," rejoined Rachel, shortly. Alice thereupon gave her a little rallying shake to restore her and slackened her pace, falling presently into such a lazy lounge that all the party were enabled to repass them.

"Don't be left behind," said the doctor, admonishing them as he went by last with Carrie Martin and his son. Rachel bade him not be anxious, promising to keep them in sight, but inly wishing Alice's

vagaries were less obnoxious to remark. She had not a word for her as they loitered on; her mouth shut, her brow knit. With her alpenstock which she carried rather unnecessarily here, she apparently marked off the different stages of her reflections, striking it on the ground now and then with sudden emphasis. Once or twice she sighed, threw back her head, and inhaled a long breath like a person thoroughly wearied, bewildered and perplexed. Then Rachel ventured to ask her what she was thinking about, but she was only bidden to be quiet for reply; and this went on for a mile or more, when they saw Sinclair waiting in the distance to be their guide through the wood into the valley; the rest having already disappeared down a rough, narrow track which would just allow the donkeys to pass and that hardly. It was a very stony road, needing all their caution and occasionally Sinclair's assistance, so that by-and-by Alice was shaken out of her silent fit and reduced to the proper use of her tongue. The first laugh she indulged in broke the spell completely; and at length, when down by the pathway came tinkling the merry little brook of the valley, her sunshine burst out, and she began to sing with all her heart in her voice some stanzas of Tennyson's beautiful song,—

1.

I come from haunts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally,
And sparkle out among the fern,
To bicker down a valley.

2.

I chatter over stony ways
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles.

3.

I murmur under moon and stars
In brambly wildernesses ;
I linger by my shingly bars,
I loiter round my cresses.

4.

And in and out I curve and flow,
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on for ever.

And so was herself again and more blithe and bonnie than she had been since the first evening at St. Goar. She seemed just to have flung the cloud behind her by an effort of will; she was strong and sound-hearted enough to cast off gloom when it would not come clear; and however perversely fate might turn and twist her fortunes, she would still have a fortune left in a healthy, happy nature. Sinclair now stayed with her and Rachel, and they hastened or lingered just as it pleased them. By-and-by Alice linked her hand in his arm, and so they went on until they

emerged into the farm-yard of one of the mills. Crossing this, and a little intervening meadow, they came out into the road that ran through the glen, and saw their party travelling leisurely forward in front. Before they could overtake them a halt was called; Miss Flora and Carrie dismounted, and with Mortimer's assistance passed the brook on stepping-stones to take refuge on a charming little knoll at the edge of the copse, which crept all the way up the hill on that side of the valley. And here luncheon was spread.

The moment Alice and her companions rejoined the others Miss Flora saw that her Sunshine was her brightest self again, and calling the dear child to sit beside her she made pretence of fastening her collar, smoothing her hair, and by other unobtrusively tender demonstrations intimated to her capricious darling the satisfaction she felt in the change. Her gloom being gone, she became the pleasantness of the afternoon to everybody. It was marvellous what a difference her altered mood made in the general effect of the day's enjoyment. If she had been grave to the end, most of the party would have gone back to their inn feeling that they had had but a dull time of it.

Luncheon was gone through with lazy enjoyment;

then Mortimer Warleigh brought out his wandering sketch-book, and would draw all his friends in their attitudes of ease ; but the most picturesque part of the group turned out to be the donkey-boys, regaling on the fragments of the feast, with their donkeys picketed beside them. Next the doctor told an adventure of his travels in Germany when he made the grand tour as a young man, and travelling was not so easy as it is now-a-days ; and finally Alice and Carrie sang a duet—such sweet singing as astonished the miller and his men, and brought them out into the blazing sun to listen. They let the time slip by now as idly as it would, for they were within two miles of their inn ; and without a single adverse incident to mar the pleasure of the day, they reached it at dusk, to find Miss Delia waiting with a heavy German tea in preparation, and the fairies helping her at her knitting, for her needles were still briskly click, clicking, though it was impossible she could see.

V.

On the following day there was a second separation amongst the travellers. Mortimer Warleigh went down to Bonn to stay with his brother Roderick ;

Dr. Ferrand and his party proceeded to Coblenz; and Rachel and Carrie Martin remained on at St. Goar, awaiting the arrival of expected letters. But there was a general understanding that they should all meet again at Remagen in three or four days if nothing unforeseen occurred to prevent it.

The Ferrands were the first to arrive there, and as they walked up from the landing-place—a thoroughly happy-looking group of pleasant English gentlefolks—a solitary man who was sitting with no other company than his pipe in the garden of the inn overlooking the river watched them with the lazy sort of interest that a Briton abroad commonly feels in his fellow-country people. The season was not fully begun and the rush of Rhine tourists had not yet set in, so that this family party had a peculiar attraction. Sir Laurence Warleigh—for he it was—had had his inn to himself for a day and a night, but these travellers were clearly making for its hospitable shelter, as he saw from the man in attendance on their baggage. As they passed below the garden trellice he endeavoured to interpret their relationship; the father and son were easy to label, but neither of the aunts looked at all like mamma, and the stately, bright-visaged girl, whose russet brown hair had escaped from its net and the shelter of her

hat, and was streaming down her back in luxuriant negligence, was evidently not of their kith and kin.

Miss Delia was marching on independently in front—there was briskness in the old lady's step yet, notwithstanding her sixty years; Miss Flora had possession of the doctor's arm, and Alice and Sinclair were bringing up the rear; he with a plaid flung over his shoulder and she with another. The solitary observant man heard her voice speaking as she went by, and something in the tone of it and in her air reminded him indefinitely of his lost Helena. He stood up and leant forward to look after her as she vanished round the corner of the house to where was the entrance, and then fell into a long dream of his darling and his poor little wildling as the smoke of his pipe curled up in the blue summer air.

He had found a letter at Mayence yesterday arresting his hurried journey homewards on his brother Oliver's account, and his previous plan of travel having been broken by the hasty summons that had brought him thus far on his way to England, he had come on to Remagen, which he had liked on a former occasion when he stayed there during his earliest wanderings of all, while Sir William Warleigh was still living and he was an exile from home

and friends. Hardly more an exile than he was now, however, for his life was for the most part lonely. He was staying at the drowsy little village speculating on the chance of being rejoined by Mortimer, who had gone away from him in some haste while they were at Munich. His nephew and he had unfortunately few tastes or pursuits in common, and Mortimer had no notion of exerting himself to cultivate such as pleased his uncle. When he became weary Sir Laurence let him go without remonstrance or complaint, though the lad's company was pleasant to him. He had tried to attach Mortimer to himself by every act of generous kindness, but had failed—failed, that is, for all practical purposes. Theoretically the young man loved, admired, respected Sir Laurence, but he could not live with him for longer than a week at a time without feeling the strain on his powers of exertion intolerable.

That evening Sir Laurence had the great room of the inn quite to himself; the new comers did not enter it, but ensconced themselves in a little salon adjoining, where was a piano, on which in the twilight Alice played some soft, low, reverie music. He went out into the balcony for his smoke and listened till it ceased; and when the dark was falling out came the young man of the party and the sunny-

faced girl with him, and stood not far off whispering together. Sir Laurence said to himself as Carrie Martin has said on a former similar occasion, "Lovers," and carried his pipe away to a bench in the garden. But all that night and till long past the midnight thoughts of Helena and Annis haunted him as they had not done for years; and on the morrow, to get away from melancholy, he took the first boat on to Cologne, and the strange fate that had brought him within reach of his wildling for a few hours drifted them asunder again as far as ever.

The same afternoon Rachel Withers and her travelling companion arrived at Remagen to find that all their friends were just gone out for a drive; but in a couple of hours' time they returned, refreshed and unfatigued by what Miss Delia announced as the most charming little *outing* she had enjoyed since they had entered the Rhineland. It had been a long, straight drive by the river.

But Rachel Withers was tired and out of sorts. Carrie Martin had been speculating all round the mystery of Alice's delusions as they came down the river from St. Goar, and an inexplicable weight and oppression had descended on Rachel's mind in consequence. She felt a vague presentiment that something was going to happen. She tried to think there

must be thunder in the air and said so, but her manner was nervous and absent.

"You are not looking your best, Rachel; what ails you?" were Miss Delia's observant words as they exchanged greetings, warning her to put off whatever traces of perplexing thought overshadowed her countenance. The ready and in this instance genuine plea of a slight headache checked further remarks, and the old lady having prescribed a cup of strong tea and the amusement of light gossip after it, hustled Rachel before her into the little salon. Here Sunshine came to her blithe as a bird, asking if she had nothing to say to *her*, and protesting that she had not so much as given her a kiss or wished her good-day. These omissions were speedily rectified, but the charge was just—Rachel had Alice so much in her mind that she had overlooked her actual presence.

"And you have had bad news—you are worried," then said Alice, holding Rachel's face between her two soft hands, and peering at her with a kindly scrutiny.

"I have had no news good, bad, or indifferent," was the answer. "I ought to have had a letter from John or from Katherine this morning, but there was no letter at all."

“Let Rachel alone, Alice; is nobody to be allowed a mood but yourself?” cried Miss Delia. “Come, my dear, and have a cup of tea—the best remedy in the world for a head-ache. Open the window, Sinclair, and let us enjoy as much as we can of the river breezes. The evening is very sultry.”

And then they gathered round the table, a group of perfectly common-place people, and talked over their cups the common-place talk of holiday-travellers, till the urn had ceased to hiss, and the evening sunshine faded into purple reflections on the hills beyond the river; till the moon rose silvering the long ripples and the last steam-boat dropt a single passenger and went by on its way to Cologne.

This one passenger turned out to be Mortimer Warleigh. When Miss Delia and Miss Flora resigned themselves into easy chairs after tea and the doctor imitated their laudable example, Alice and Carrie had begun to sing duets: then Sinclair, whose bass was magnificent, joined them in a glee, until the music brought a furtive group of listeners out upon the balcony and under it in the road—Mortimer amongst them. He took the privilege of a friend abroad, and looking in at the open window he asked how everybody did and if he might join them; and permission being granted, as a matter of course,

he entered the salon and was one with them for the rest of the evening. He had been there but a few minutes when there came a knock at the door and the landlord presented himself with the official volume in which all persons resting a night at an Inn must inscribe their names. Before writing his own, Mortimer glanced up the page at those already there, and notified his discovery of his uncle's by exclaiming, "Oh, Rachel Withers, Sir Laurence was here last night—did you see him?"

"No; we only arrived at Remagen this afternoon," was Rachel's reply.

Mortimer then questioned the landlord as to Sir Laurence's coming and going, and being told that his destination was Cologne he wrote a few lines for which a messenger was to be found swifter than the post, who would seek him at the most likely hotels and give him the letter, unless he had gone on his way and was already out of reach.

It was a pity and very singular, Miss Delia observed, condoling with the young man, that Sir Laurence Warleigh should have passed his nephew on his homeward road without meeting, when a meeting would have been so pleasant. She had often been struck, she said, by the strange, hair's-breadth disappointments that people encounter in

this world; doubtless there was a providential design in them, though to the weak in faith they seemed so useless and contradictory. She went on in her moral strain a long while, nobody listening very attentively to her platitudes except Rachel, who always lent her ears good-naturedly to a neglected speaker; but how much more would the good old lady have marvelled at the inscrutable complexity of human affairs could she have known who had been within sight and speech of Alice last night, and had gone on his unconscious way this morning!

When Mortimer Warleigh joined the party the music had given place to conversation, and on lights being brought in presently, Rachel noticed that Alice shrunk into the shade and bent her face low over a book. Just then Miss Flora gently terminated her sister's sermonette by saying,—

“I think you once told us, Rachel, that Sir Laurence Warleigh married a Miss Gwynne, did you not? I knew a Mrs. Gwynne slightly some years ago.”

“Yes, she was a young Roman Catholic lady, an orphan; she lived with her grandmother at a place called Everham in Surrey, before her marriage,” replied Rachel.

When Miss Flora asked her simple question Alice

started, and now intense listening was expressed in every line of her face.

"Ah, then she must have been Helena—our old friend's grandchild!" cried Miss Delia. "Mrs. Gwynne was one of the Talboys of Dorsetshire—she was a *strong* Papist, but a good woman in her way.

"Sir Laurence's young wife was called Helena; she was a beautiful creature—I knew and loved her dearly," said Rachel.

"And her father would be James Gwynne—he was in the Navy," went on Miss Delia. "He was the last of the Surrey branch; there are two or three Gwynnes left in Dorsetshire, but the family is dwindling out." And this information the genealogical old lady followed up with a long prose on the antiquity and dignity of the race which had twice intermarried with the Ferrands.

"Sir Laurence's wife was not kindly received amongst his friends; indeed, I believe they never acknowledged her at all," interposed Mortimer. "Old Mrs. Damer Warleigh of Bristowe stood her friend, but the rest neglected her. It was a cruel shame; why should a man not marry to please himself? However, she died very soon, and then they were sorry. My uncle Laurence loves her memory to this day. They had one child, a little girl, whom

I can just remember; a passionate, wild little creature, who was sent to my mother to be taken care of. We both had the scarlet fever together at Hastings, and she died."

At this instant Rachel Withers happened to look towards Alice, who was watching the speaker with intent wide-open eyes; her lips dumb but breathless and apart, as if her heart were panting in an agony of vehement, suppressed emotion. Carrie Martin also was observing her; observing her with the keen scrutiny of a person bent on following a secret into its remotest ramifications for the pure love of a romantic mystery.

"Family disunion is very much to be deplored," said Miss Delia; "but it is not often repented of until repentance is too late."

"Nearly eleven o'clock, Alice!" here cried the doctor, nipping his sister's fresh preachment in the bud. "All out, eleven o'clock, I declare!" appealing to his watch. "Time for early birds to be gone to roost when there is a long flight before them in the morning."

"Time for all of us," said Miss Flora; "I had no idea it was so late." And ten minutes after good-nights were said and all had dispersed to their several apartments.

On the stairs Alice kissed Rachel, who could not but feel how cold was her face and how tremulous her lips. The poor excited girl would fain have continued with her the subject that had been cut short below, but Rachel was weary, she did not know what was impending, and she longed for peace and seclusion in her own room. She left Alice at her door therefore, and wishing her happy dreams with a feigned carelessness, passed forward and left her standing outside with a wistful disappointment in her eyes as she watched her disappear. Rachel was angry with herself for her coldness, and leisurely undressing she had time to think the matter over and to reflect on the probable complexion of those happy dreams she had wished the child; and tingling with self-reproach she at length determined to go to her, though with what intention she had no distinct idea.

Not receiving any answer to her first cautious knock, she turned the handle of the door; it yielded and she went in, calling softly, "Alice, Alice, where are you?" for she did not see her, her candle being out, and only the moonlight shining into the room. She was not in bed nor made ready for it; she was kneeling on the floor near the window, weeping convulsively, and when Rachel put her arm round

her to lift her up, her whole frame was quivering and shaken by the violence of her sobs. "Alice, darling, what is it? what ails you?" she asked, entreatingly. But Alice would give her no answer then except, "Let me be—leave me; I want to be by myself," though she grew calmer by-and-by when she found Rachel persisted in not leaving her until she was safe on her pillow. That achieved she would have made haste to be gone, but Alice would not then suffer her to escape so easily."

"Rachel, you know what troubles me, I see you do," said she, with earnest lips. "Don't tell me like all the rest of the world that I am under delusions—they are *not* delusions. They are more real and more precious to me than all on earth besides, except one thing and that is dear Sinclair's love."

"I will not tell you they are delusions, Alice, for I begin to think there must be something in them," responded Rachel.

"*You do!* Oh, bless you, Rachel, for those good words!" and Alice gave her an energetic embrace, and fell to weeping in an ecstasy. Poor Rachel, sober by nature, and long set by habit in calm, quiet ways, was terribly puzzled and perplexed by the outbursts of more passionate characters. She could only sit by watching and wondering and wishing

they were over, as she did now, until Alice with a sigh as drawn up from the very depths of her soul, sobbed out, "I can be patient now—I only wish it were Sinclair who believed instead of you. May I tell him what you have said? From you it will come like words of truth and soberness—me he laughs at even *now*. Oh, Rachel, how you have gladdened my heart!"

"Darling, what have I done?" asked Rachel, half frightened at the effects of her unconsidered words. "I cannot help you—perhaps I am only one goose the more for saying what I have said. If there be anything secret it will come out in the end. Let me say good-night, now; if you want any more talk about it, stay till to-morrow."

"But I may tell Sinclair; I *must*—I always do," urged Alice, still detaining her.

"Very well, and he will laugh at me too, no doubt—perhaps, even, he will be displeased. I cannot help it if he be, it has been creeping into my mind for some time past that your delusions are not all frost-work of fancy. Some of them may be unreal, but I honestly believe there is a truth at the root of them." Rachel made this profession of her faith with a sort of reckless determination, and having made it she would not have hesitated about repeating it, had the

occasion offered, either to the aunts or to Mr. Gilsland himself! Alice kissed her again with crazy enthusiasm, overwhelmed her with expressions of gratitude, and would hardly let her go. Rachel was the first person who had given her a gleam of hope and encouragement, and it was with a heart full almost to agony that she lay down at last, sobbing, "Oh! papa, dear papa, I *shall* see you again, though the time be ever so long!"

VI.

The traces of Alice's passionate emotion were left on her face the next morning, and the excursion that had been planned for the day was deferred by common consent until the morrow.

"She has had one of her most violent moods last night; I see it in her eyes, but she looks exalted nevertheless; what can she have taken into her head now, I wonder?" murmured Miss Delia in distressed anxiety.

The speculation troubled Sinclair too; he saw she had wept a flood, and that now she was singing in her heart rejoicings over some mysterious source of gladness. By-and-by, after luncheon, he invited her to come out into the air, and they wandered

away alone by the river beyond Fürstenburg, not talking much on the way until they came to a group of walnut-trees in a shady little hollow, where she suggested that they might rest.

"You are very tired, Sunshine," said he, as she dropt with a weary sigh on the soft warm turf; "lean against my arm—so; you will never weep yourself into stone like Niobe, but you will melt away from me like a cloud if you let these wild fancies fret you every day in this fashion."

"You are not to call them wild fancies any longer, Sinclair, if you love me," was her quick reply. "I know you love me, and I bid you try to believe them too." Sinclair looked as if he had the best will in the world to perform her behests, but could not for sheer perplexity. He kept a grave face, however, and did not smile as his wont was on similar occasions. "I have something to tell you," she went on with confiding earnestness; "but first tell me whether you think Rachel Withers is a shrewd, sensible woman or not?"

"Yes, I think she is a plain, honest little body; but what has Rachel Withers to do with us?"

"*She* thinks there must be something real in what you call my delusions," was the triumphant response.

Sinclair was certainly taken by surprise.

"Does she? On what grounds?" he asked, deliberating.

Alice was not prepared with grounds.

"She thinks so because she does," was all she found to reply, but she uttered it as if it were incontrovertible evidence.

Sinclair smiled now in spite of his endeavours.

"You are laughing at me!" then said Alice pettishly, and withdrew herself from his arm to rest against the tree instead. If his moral support failed her, neither would she have that other.

"Alice!" said he, reproach in eyes and voice; so she came back and told him he was not kind.

"What would you have me do? Hunt this delusion of yours through cloudland as you are doing? I wish you would let us live at peace on common earth instead!" said he, half in jest, half in vexed earnest.

"No, Sinclair, it troubles my life, it troubles my love for you. Now, when if ever I am to be happy, I ought to be the happiest, it crosses every hope. If it were but a shadow it would fade, but it strengthens against the brightness. The thought of papa aches in my heart the bitterest when I am near you. It never leaves me now; I hide it, but

it is always there. He is somewhere in the world by himself alone, and I am here with you."

Sinclair looked into the pathetic supplication of her lovely eyes, and said,

"Bid me do anything and I will do it—give me any clue and it shall go hard, but I will run it to the end. Must I seek Mr. Gilsland and try to discover if he has been playing us all false! But why should he—where is the profit to him if he be?"

"That I cannot tell, but he is a bad, treacherous man; and if any one knows where papa is he must know. Oh! Sinclair, don't watch me so doubtfully! Am I a fool, am I an idiot, that I should dream dreams like these that harass me night and day? It would be wicked and faithless if I folded my hands and tried to sleep them away, and I cannot, I cannot! There is much gone out of my memory, but enough remains to assure me that it is truth and not fancy that they grow out of; and things, many things that were dim a while ago are becoming clearer now."

Sinclair, if not moved to a full acceptance of her belief, was at all events moved to something; for he said,

"Tell me again, Alice, and as explicitly as you

can, whatever you recollect before you came to Brookfall.

“It will be for the hundredth time,” replied she pathetically; nevertheless she began to recite again all those obscure recollections with which she had once before amazed Rachel Withers when they were on the Claymire downs together. They were such scenes as might paint themselves picture-like on a child’s memory, and become worn and half obliterated by lapse of time. She had a confused vision with much terror in it of what Sinclair could only explain as the sword-dance which is danced by the plough-lads in the Northern counties about Yuletide. Then she described a room that was very pretty, where she never touched anything, and which she never entered but with her father; and another room with dogs on the hearth and a high carved mantel-piece. She had a slight idea of the few days at Bristowe, and of the last good-by on the sea-shore at Hastings; and after that there was nothing but darkness until the episode of the prison life in Paris. Thus far there was nothing inconsistent with Mr. Gilsland’s account of her parentage given to the aunts; and of this Sinclair gently reminded her; he had heard it all before many, many times with the same result.

“ But listen to me furtlier,” she said arresting him. “ Is anything we have seen, or felt, or done, ever forgotten? I believe it is not. It hides itself from us, perhaps for long years, but some day the light flashes into the dark corner and there it lurks. Sometimes it seems as if my memory were playing at hide and seek with me—but it never can again conceal that dreadful place where I first saw Mr. Gilsland. Papa was not there and never had been. He kissed me good-by for the last time on the sea-shore. This prison had dark, damp blue walls and gratings to the windows, and there was a grey rat ran in and out of a hole in the skirting-board; I gave it bits of my bread and it grew almost tame. I should know that horrible place now if I could see it again. I was always cold and hungry there, and when I cried in my misery they beat me. Then I used to try and say ‘Gentle Jesus’—Sinclair, I could cry *now* to think of myself doing that, as if I were some other little wretched child. ‘Gentle Jesus’ was the little hymn I used to say for prayers at home with papa; I forgot it for years and years after I came to Brookfall, but one day you remember when I was reading a book at the rectory I found it quoted as a Catholic child’s hymn, and all in a moment I knew it. I used to say ‘Gentle Jesus,’

but in the book where I met with it again it was printed 'Holy Jesus.' I am not a little child any longer, but every night I say it before going to sleep—it is the only clear, complete thing left me of the days when I was happy with papa except his face—and I should know him, Sinclair, if I met him in a desert or on the top of one of the pyramids of Egypt."

Sinclair suggested that he must have grown older and have changed somewhat since they parted.

"He cannot have grown so old but that *I* shall know him," was her fervent answer, and then she fell silent.

Sinclair sat musing and silent too. Of *names* of persons or places she could not recal one; evidently names, mere *sounds*, did not live in her mind like *sights*—things beheld with the bodily eyes. When she first saw Lady Georgiana Warleigh at Claymire she had insisted upon it to Rachel Withers and to Sinclair also that a mutual recognition had passed like a flash between them; but she could not afterwards connect her with any distinct portion of her recollections. Sinclair meditated on this. Of all the faces he had ever seen, easy to be remembered, perhaps Lady Georgiana Warleigh's was one of the easiest. Pallid and deeply pitted with the small-pox

as it was, it could hardly have changed by a single line since those dreadful sears of disease were imprinted upon it. Her countenance was one of those which met but once and in a throng of strangers could never again be forgotten; a harsh, powerful visage it was, mask-like in its unchangeability; with grey green eyes shallow as a reflection on polished steel; with a strong jaw and teeth sharp and glittering in a narrow thin-lipped mouth—cruelty and remorseless determination its most marked characteristic. Her lithe, serpentine grace of form and manner would only be a repellent force the more coupled with her marred face; and fear, abhorrence, and dread had been from the moment of their meeting Alice's only feelings towards her.

Sinclair revolved these circumstances over and over in his mind until he caught himself saying like Rachel that there might be something in Alice's delusions; he forbore to tell her so yet, however, and only promised that if she would try to be brave and cheerful until they reached home again, then he would set to work on Mr. Gilsland with such evidence as she had given him, and do his best to discover what was hidden, *if anything*.

"It is no use implying a doubt, Sinclair, you will never shake my faith," replied she, smiling. "I

am very, very happy, but these old stories always give me a heart-ache!" and she pressed a hand hard against her bosom as she spoke.

"My darling, you shall keep your faith for me!" said Sinclair, touched by the pathetic gesture. "You must have suffered when you were little. You made early acquaintance with hardship, but let my love compensate you for that past. Live in the present, Alice, don't look always far back or far forward when you should be bright now."

And then they went home again to their Alice conscious of more strength in her hopes than ever, and loving Sinclair and all the world better for the assurance. Throughout the evening she was quiet and meditative, and had Rachel Withers been anxious to speak of what had passed between them the night before, she must have taken the initiative, for which she had neither the courage nor inclination. She expected Sinclair to say something in reference to it, and for this she had not long to wait. After tea the young man called her out into the balcony and repeated all that Alice had told him.

"For my part," then said he, "I am well contented with things as they are; but since she cannot rest and you have given your support to her belief, something must be done. I have promised her that

if she will be good until we go home I will take Mr. Gilsland in hand myself, and do my utmost to discover if there be any trickery in his dealing with my aunts about her. Meanwhile let the matter rest quietly amongst ourselves—they have been worried about it enough already; and I would rather not see them unnecessarily fretted now.

Rachel was thankful to acquiesce in this arrangement of the difficulty; during the day she had been a good deal disquieted by her rash admission of the night before; but she now perceived that Sinclair's incredulity also had been shaken. When Alice whispered at her good-night that he was going to try to *find out*, she understood that he had forbidden her to refrain from talking over her hopes. And this he had done. For the present his own faith in them was so slight that he wished them to gain no new strength from being dwelt on in conversation; and Alice, stilled by his promise and her own implicit reliance on it, followed his wise counsel without a murmur.

VII.

On the following morning when Rachel Withers and Carrie Martin went down to the little salon to

pay their compliments to their friends they found Miss Delia occupying it alone; all the others having set off already on an excursion to the Blue Lake, Mortimer Warleigh accompanying them. The old lady was at her work and said she should be glad of their society; so they stayed and bore her company, she, as usual, leading and absorbing the conversation.

Miss Delia's irresistible propensity to do everybody good has been mentioned before, and those who understand the powerful nature of this propensity will also understand how it must have been urging her in the direction of Carrie Martin ever since that singular and misguided person came within her reach. A more unpromising subject for her benevolent practices she would have had to go far to find; Carrie had long since made up her mind to live her life in her own fashion, and according to her own tastes, and was not likely to put herself in bonds to any—the best meaning woman in the world.

But worthy Miss Delia was troubled with no doubts. She felt her good intentions burning in her heart, and she sat down systematically to her task, throwing in her little attacks wherever she saw that Carrie was weakest. Rachel looked on, not altogether unamused, while Carrie, unaware of Miss Delia's designs, received her mild attempts without

resistance. She rather liked women of the Ferrands' order. "They are genuinely good and true," said she, "though more worldly-wise than they appear on the surface. It is they who can afford to have amiable crotchets and to perform charitable eccentricities. Providence takes care of them—they are clothed like the lilies of the field; they open their mouths and they are filled. Good. Set them to a day's work for a day's bread, and they would sleep hungry. Fortune does for us better than we can do for ourselves."

Thus when Miss Delia talked in her hazy fluent style on spiritual matters, Carrie composed her countenance, and was patient and non-understanding. She would not have hurt the kind soul's feelings for the world; she hoped that every Christian sect had salvation in the midst of its errors of doctrine and system, and would never have ventured on the responsibility of disturbing anybody's faith for the sake of bringing them over to her own little private views. Carrie had been brought up herself amongst the straitest sect of the Evangelical party, and had broken away from their narrowness of rule since she came to maturity; but for old sake's sake, when she heard Miss Delia prose like certain ancient, dear kinswomen of her

own who once bored her to extinction, she listened and was eminently respectful.

But when the adventurous old lady forsook Things Unseen and aspired in her innocence to reform Carrie's mode of life and to abolish her frivolous writings, then Carrie pricked up her ears and rallied to the defence, demanding sarcastically if Miss Delia had duly considered before she administered her dose of advice what would be the result suppose it were taken? No, Miss Delia said, she had not.

"The result would be the abandonment of all my means of living," answered Carrie. "Now it is a fixed idea of mine that nobody for prejudice's sake should interfere with another person's lawful gains who is not prepared to indemnify him for his losses. If you will settle two or three hundred a year on me for life, Miss Delia, it may be worth my while to take into consideration what you have got to say; if you cannot do this you must not meddle with my way of earning the money, which is not wrong of itself, but only against the grain of certain venerable prejudices which you entertain." The serene audacity of this speech took Miss Delia quite aback; she had not a word to offer in reply, and, as might be expected, she let Carrie and her idle works alone for the future.

The travellers, Mortimer Warleigh excepted,

remained three days longer at Remagen—three quiet drowsy days that passed very pleasantly to all of them. The piano beguiled the lazy hours that they could not spend out of doors. Alice did not attempt ambitious songs, but her voice was delicious. She appeared to feel great enjoyment in her gift too; and her aunt Flora told Rachel that whenever she was mentally out of tune at home, she always took refuge in her piano, and the airs she played then would be a sure key to her mood. Going by this criterion, she was in a dreamy reverie now, mingled of hope, joy and sadness; and her face in its abstracted calm betrayed a mind resting and waiting amongst many perplexing thoughts.

The weather was hot, with short sharp showers at intervals to cool the air. One night there was a thunderstorm that eclipsed the sunset, but the atmospheric effects upon the hills were grand, and grand too was the sonorous ærial chorus that reverberated amongst them. For fairer times there was the charming walk by the river towards Fürstenburg under rich fern-draped cliffs that were lovely in their moist luxuriance of fern and flower; and on a lofty hill above the town was an exquisite church but recently rebuilt. For situation it was enchanting, and within and without for rich unity and completeness of design

it was admirable. There was a monastery close by which looked bare and poverty-stricken enough, and Miss Delia had her eyes shocked or delighted—it is uncertain which—by the spectacle of an exceedingly comely young monk in brown robes, with his cowl hanging down his back and his breviary under his arm, rushing across from the church to the house. She screwed up her eyes and gasped and looked very much horrified in the face, but she extracted so much pathetic disquisition from the incident afterwards that it was generally believed that she would on no account have missed it. She had seen a *monk*, she told them at the inn, and he was very much like that handsome wife of the wheelwright's at Claymire—she was not laughing, poor fellow, he really was.

The last evening went by cheerfully. The elders were homesick and glad to see the end of their travels near at hand; and Alice had her private reasons to be glad too. Miss Delia with a little comfortable air of mystery whispered once to Rachel that she should perhaps have *something* to tell her when they met again at home, but for the present she would give her no *hint* of it. Rachel teased and said why did Miss Delia indulge herself and tantalize her by intimating that there was a happy secret on the way unless she meant to explain herself further? but the old lady

only laughed, saying she knew Rachel's spirit of inquisitiveness and she must just wait her time for relief. But Rachel was not much worried; she had a tolerably accurate guess as to what Miss Delia's grand secret must be.

And on the morrow the travellers separated, and went each party their separate way; the Ferrands home by Verviers, Paris, and Rouen, Rachel Withers and Carrie Martin by the route through Belgium.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

A LOST LINK.

The unjust man shall not live out half his days.

I.

“OSTEND is a horrid place, Rachel,” observed Carrie Martin, as she sat with her friend in their room at Brussels.

“Yes, I have always heard so—but what have we to do with Ostend?” said Rachel in reply.

“It has a magnificent marine-parade and is the fashionable watering-place for all North Germany.” Rachel looked up to see if her companion were reading from the guide-book; but no, she was lying back in her chair quite at ease.

“Do you want to go there, Carrie?”

“Yes—if you have no objection; just for two or three days of sea breezes before returning to London. I shall not get out of it again until next year at this time probably. You are sure you will not very much dislike it, Rachel?”

Rachel was sure she should not dislike it at all;

the sea was always welcome and pleasant to her; and the following morning they found themselves at Ostend; comfortably established within three minutes' walk of the Parade.

It was very wild weather—more like November than July—but they made their way to the pier in the afternoon, notwithstanding, to watch the English boat beat into harbour; and though they could hardly keep their feet, there they stayed for a couple of hours, making believe to enjoy the bluster for their health's sake. It was a fine sight to watch the massive grey-green waves rolling in and breaking against the sea-wall while the wind rent off their foam-crests and spurned them in showers of spray through the air. They were thoroughly drenched and chilled before they could resign themselves to the idea of a quiet evening at their inn; but at length even Carrie, who had an almost crazy liking for a stormy sky, suggested that perhaps they had had enough of it; and as she began to shiver and turn blue Rachel agreed with her.

They therefore set their faces once more towards a refuge, and while steering their difficult way along the Parade, dotted with adventurous sight-seers like themselves, Rachel observed, staggering

along before them, a figure which she was sure she knew; and on approaching nearer she recognized Mr. Gilsland. He had stopt about a dozen paces in front of them, being seized with a violent paroxysm of coughing, and was supporting himself by one of the benches that stood along under the wall. His lean, colourless hand clutching the back, struck Rachel first, and an irresistible impulse of pity caused her to pause and say before she thought what she was doing. "Oh, Mr. Gilsland, you are very ill; this is no day for you to be out of doors!"

He started and stared at her with painful, pallid eyes, while Carrie whispered, "There is death in the man's face, Rachel."

Rachel hoped he did not overhear the incautious words, though it could matter little whether he did or not; he must have known the truth before, and the next moment he said as much. "I am so ill that there can be but one end to it, and the sooner it is over the better."

Rachel felt inexpressibly shocked and distressed; she stood silent and motionless, the tears in her eyes, unwilling to go on, yet bewildered what else to do, until Carrie helped her out of her strait. Carrie had no special sympathy with prosperous sinners, but show her any one ill or forsaken, though they

might have been ever so bad and notorious, and she was full of service and active pity. She would have stopped to succour a friendless dog in the streets. She now inquired of Mr. Gilsland if his wife were at Ostend with him, and being told that she was not, she asked further if they could be of any assistance to him in any way. He said he should like to talk to Rachel on the morrow or the day after if she would see him. Rachel observed that he called her by her name; she was, indeed, the last straw of human sympathy he found to cling to in his drowning misery. Her mind at once rushed to the thought of Alice, and she said she would see him—not on the morrow, which was Sunday, but on the following morning. Poor, guilty, forlorn wretch! there was no longer need for alarm, and no longer leisure for temporizing; Death would soon absolve him from all his perils, and take away the chance of purging his burdened conscience by confession.

All this while the wind was blowing about them like a hurricane; it seemed wonderful how his broken emaciated frame could bear up against it, but when Carrie suggested that they must move on to some shelter he crawled by them into the town, and they left him at a cabaret near the ramparts,

and not far from their own inn. When he was gone up to the wretched room which was the only habitation left him, Rachel, looking behind, saw the woman of the house at the door, and leaving Carrie for a moment, she returned, asked a few questions, then put into her hand what would purchase decent care and nurture for him as long as his ebbing life seemed likely to last. Bittersweet was right. She could not see this man she had once loved, sick and in misery, and pass him by on the other side. An exceeding pitifulness swelled in her heart as she remembered his life, begun with almost arrogant hopes and ending in such shameful wreck. When she overtook her friend again there were great tears brimming her eyes and rolling down her cheeks. Carrie knew that it would not comfort her to call him all the scamps and scoundrels in creation, nor yet to deliver a homily on the natural issue and conclusion of his life, therefore she held her peace and contented herself with pulling down Rachel's veil over her face.

The next day was the Fête-dieu and the beginning of the Kermesse. The wind was still very high and the grand street procession of priests and people with their sacred images and banners had a hard struggle against it. The friends went out on

the Parade, however, and in passing the cabaret where Mr. Gilsland lodged they saw his white face leaning towards the glass and looking after the throng. The following morning the town was in a tumult with the fair, and the weather blew so loud and shrill that Carrie Martin openly regretted having come to Ostend at all. It was a noisy little den where Mr. Gilsland was hiding; all that day and the next Rachel did not venture to approach it, for it overflowed with soldiers and country-folks celebrating the Kermesse with heavy libations of beer, and songs that echoed down the street tumultuously. She wished anxiously that he could have been removed to quieter quarters, but nobody was found willing to take in a sick man to nurse at the season when all the North was sending its tribes to Ostend for their annual sea-dip.

On the Wednesday there was calm round the little tavern, and she went to the door, where the woman met her with the news that Mr. Gilsland was writing and had forbidden any one to disturb him. Rachel had not courage to be urgent—she, in her heart, shrank from the spectacle of his ruin; but she imagined there was a duty for her to do; something for her to hear; and later in the day she returned and renewed her application to see him.

She was too late. He was gone. The woman of the house told her that on going up to his room with his dinner about noon, she found him leaning back in his chair *dead*; a number of sealed letters on the table before him; the pen with which he had written them in his fingers still. Rachel went away without a word.

It had been a rapid break-up of the constitution with Mr. Gilsland. He had come over to Ostend shortly before Christmas to evade his debts, and had been attacked almost immediately with severe inflammation of the lungs. Poor living and neglect completed the mischief this had begun; symptoms of consumption declared themselves; he had not the means to seek a more genial climate, nor perhaps the inclination. His wife had refused to come to him, or to afford him any maintenance out of her fortune, which at their marriage had been settled securely on herself; and thus he had been kept for months hovering on the brink of destitution; saved only from the last extremity by the scant wages of his guilt, sent to him at irregular intervals through Dr. Frith.

When Rachel returned to their inn after a very brief absence, Carrie saw at a glance that all was over. There was a touch of the grotesque-pathetic in her passion of grief. Carrie did not offer her conventional phrases of comfort. She sat in her

chair regarding her, letting her tears have their way, and considering within herself how curiously and wonderfully women's hearts of the good sort are made. Here was a man—a very vermin amongst men—dead, and a woman weeping for him as for a lost love and saint on earth! When there came a lull, Carrie did not allude to his meannesses, his frauds, his hypocrisies, or bid Rachel remember how little worthy he was of her tears; on the contrary, she tried to say of him any good she could recollect ever to have heard anybody else say, and the calm was effectual.

“He had no courage, that was where he failed first; and the first step wrong set him so far wrong altogether that he could never get right again,” said Rachel when she gained a tolerable command over her voice. “People who are not tempted in the same way should not judge him. I was very fond of him once—I don’t think a day has gone over my head since I was a girl that I have not thought of him more or less. I never cared for anybody else as I did for him, never—I suppose you will say I am a fool.”

“Not at all—I never call love wasted. If it does nothing else it keeps one’s own heart warm,” replied Carrie, adding as a private mental reservation,

“Commend me to these quiet women for long memories.” By-and-by she observed aloud that this event would hinder the inquiries about Alice. “Moral certainties are very well as far as they go, and I am morally certain she is no niece of Mr. Gilsland’s; but it would have facilitated measures if he had said so. What will Sinclair Ferrand do now, I wonder!”

“I had forgotten all that!” sighed Rachel. Of course she had—she was dreaming of Hurtleale and sunshine and old times and the things that might have been and never were; culminating in that rigid figure dead in the chair which she had not seen but vividly imagined, and the authorities taking possession of his papers and speculating over the English priest dying neglected in a low, miserable tavern.

Presently Carrie suggested that they should pack up their chattels, order their bill, and leave Ostend by that night’s boat; but Rachel’s keen, remonstrant No, apprised her that she meant to stay and see Mr. Gilsland buried. She did stay, and in the wind and rain stood by while he was laid in his dishonoured, alien grave—the only mourner, if she could be called a mourner, who followed him with a regret or a tear to that bourne. His life of

mean ambitions, shifts, compromises, was ended, and the moral of it may be briefly summed up in that pithy sentence, that "to be weak is to be wicked."

The same night Carrie and her companion crossed over to Dover in wild stormy weather, and by the next Rachel was quiet and safe at home again in her cottage at Claymire after that bad, sorrowful dream.

II.

It was inexpressibly pleasant and soothing to Rachel to be still again after the continual movement of the last six weeks and the wearing excitement of the final days at Ostend. The Ferrands were at home and Brookfall was at its brightest again; sunshine without and sunshine within, and Miss Flora and Miss Delia in the very best of good humours. They saw Rachel for a few minutes the morning after her return, but finding her visibly fatigued and needing rest, they would not stay then, and made no opportunity of telling her their happy little mystery, but she had a very shrewd guess what it was. She believed Sinclair had made his lover's profession of faith to Alice, that Alice had responded to it, and that the good aunts were inclined to rejoice. And she was right.

Rachel had been at home full a week before she felt herself equal to returning the visits of her friends and acquaintance; but one morning at the end of that time she roused herself and made an effort to walk up to Brookfall. It was that hour of the day when the pretty place wore its most picturesque aspect; when the lights were the strongest and the shadows the deepest in the narrow ravine down which poured the slender cascade that gave it its name. Insensibly the familiar beauty, the pure air, the balmy breeze cheered her; her thoughts got away from that blank grave at Ostend, and she saw that the sky was blue, the sun shining, and pleasant life in the world for all its shadow.

She arrived at the cottage at a most inopportune season, as she perceived directly she was ushered into the drawing-room, but retreat was then too late, and she was compelled to see and hear the contest between Miss Delia and her *protégée* which was going on in the presence of Miss Flora and Dr. Ferrand. Miss Delia was flurried and heated exceedingly, and as soon as her greetings with Rachel were over she broke forth into explanations.

“Rachel, we have heard this day that poor Mr. Gilsland—Alice’s only relative as you know—is

dead ; and would you believe that the naughty puss absolutely refuses to put on mourning for him ? I think I never in my life before heard of such shocking perversity." This sudden announcement of what Rachel knew so well already nearly upset her ; she had made no mention to any one of the event that had detained her at Ostend. She was a bad feigner ; but she said, Yes, she had heard of Mr. Gilsland's death ; and then, while the doctor retreated to what was called the Prospect Window and lost himself as much as possible in the view to avoid hearing his sister's repetitionary arguments, she nervously took a seat opposite the delinquent and listened.

Alice was sitting on the ottoman arrayed in a bright blue muslin dress, with her Leghorn hat on her lap, and in the crown of it a heap of flowers which she had gathered into it as into a basket. She had her stubborn face on, but for all that a smile was lurking about her lips, and when she glanced across at Rachel there was no mistaking her expression of wilful defiance. Any one less in mourning mood could not well be imagined.

"It is in *The Times*—he died at Ostend more than a week ago, and now his widow has sent a card ;" Miss Delia proceeded in an excited tone.

"It is not that we admire him, though many did, or that Alice could be expected to love him, but I have no idea of kinship being thrust aside as not of any account. There is a certain respect that must and ought to be paid to ties of blood. I would not have her go into deep crape—that is not called for—neither need she give up her hat in the garden, but I shall insist on her wearing a black dress."

"I hate black!" ejaculated Sunshine. "I wore black when I was a miserable, friendless, beaten little girl, and I will never wear black again so long as I am happy; never, never, never! and I am happy now."

"Hush, darling, hush!" interposed Miss Flora mildly; "you must not speak in that way. Death is a very serious consideration, and it will come to you some day, though you be ever so happy."

Alice took up a spray of ivy-geranium and a crimson rose, and proceeded to dress her hat therewith; then she emptied the rest of her garden spoils beside her on the ottoman, and leisurely arranged them into a posy for her band. It seemed as if she were bent on making herself as gay and festive as possible. Miss Delia observed her with heightened colour and reproachful eyes. "Alice,

what possesses you?" said she, solemnly. "You are heartless, you are wicked just now. You rejoice that Mr. Gilsland is dead—you are thinking he can never molest you again!"

"He can never molest me again!" echoed Alice, growing grave all at once. "He can never molest me again! That is good news—why should I pretend to grieve at hearing it? You used to say to me once—afraid yourself—that he could claim me if he would, and take me away from you. I have not forgotten it. But now his power is at an end, and I am glad—yes, I am very glad!" And she crowned herself with her garlanded hat in token thereof, looking from one to the other of her audience with perfect composure and assurance.

"He did not persecute you much after you came to Brookfall, Alice; you might afford to forgive him *now*," murmured Miss Flora. "Your fate would, perhaps, have been worse had he not taken charge of you when your father died."

Rachel looked up at Alice as these quiet words were spoken, and saw a great wave of emotion pass over her face. She was silent till her heart settled into a calm again, and then she said in a low but most determined tone that gathered force as she went on, "I never believed that my father

was dead, aunt Flora, and I do not believe it yet. If Mr. Gilsland has told the truth about me, I will forgive him; if not, I shall loathe his memory even more than I loathed his name. He took me away when I was wretchedly ill and unhappy, but it was not from my father he took me. It was from amongst cruel strangers who were worse to me than he was. It is not all clear to me now, but it comes by glimpses; and some day it will come like lightning, and I shall see dear papa again. I shall, aunt Delia, I tell you I shall; I have said so to Sinclair a thousand times, and it is true!"

Miss Delia breathed a profound sigh; these were Alice's old assertions that were too mad to be answered; she had heard similar speeches often before with as little heed as she heard them now. She passed them over as calmly as if they had never been uttered, and took up again the first bone of contention. "Miss Edge will come this afternoon to try you on, Alice, and I desire that you will not go out of the way. You must have a paramatta for common wear, and nice silk with crape trimmings for better occasions."

"It is of no use causing them to be made, auntie Dee, for I will never put them on," was

the firm reply. "Mr. Gilsland was no more akin to me than I am akin to the man in the moon." Perhaps a stronger illustration of the argument could not have been offered, and it exasperated Miss Delia to the utmost. She bade Alice leave the room, and without a moment's hesitation Alice left it accordingly—perhaps not sorry to be dismissed.

The doctor came away from the Prospect Window as Alice quitted the room, and Miss Delia immediately asked, appealing to him, "What do you think of mourning apparel, brother? Is it right or respectful to neglect it?"

The doctor thought in a general way that it might be worn or let alone according to each person's private feelings or prejudices. His son had communicated to him Alice's wishes and his own pledge to make the researches she desired; and this, combined with her own asseverations, which he had just heard, were not without influence on his mind. He, too, began to think there might be something in Sunshine's vagaries.

"I do not like these modern ways and innovations," was Miss Delia's reply to his opinion. "When we were young the wearing of black was graduated most strictly according to the degrees of relationship, and we even put it on for friends. I

do not know how we should have been regarded had we dared to infringe on so proper and universal a custom."

"But we never thought it pleasant wear, Delia dear," observed Miss Flora. "In hot and dusty weather like this it was especially disagreeable. I always dislike it myself."

"Yes, I remember you did; and the smell of black woollen dye is very stuffy," Miss Delia admitted. "But if we ought to do a thing for respect's sake we *ought*, and there is an end of it. One piece of affectation only would I abolish, and that is the widow's cap. It was all very well when women cut off their hair as a sign of sorrow and bereavement, then it was necessary to wear a covering over the head; but, now when you see the rich braids and puffs and plaits through the transparent tarlatane, why, it is a mere frivolity to put it on."

The doctor smiled, and the wicked little tongue of a listener at the open window, till now unobserved, startled them all by saying: "But, auntie Dee, it is very becoming. Young Lady Monke looks very pretty in hers, and everybody says she is ever so happy since old Sir Roger died who was so dreadful to her—worse than Mrs. Pendarves'

Gromio. Would you like to hear a bit of news I have just had from Miss Crispe at the gate?"

"What is it?" asked Miss Delia, forgetting her displeasure in the frank interest she took in her neighbours' affairs. But just at that instant appeared in the distance Sinclair coming up to the house, and Sunshine flashed away to meet him without replying. Then Miss Flora, mildly raising her eyes to look after her, said what Rachel's hopes and expectations had already anticipated.

"I do not know, dear Rachel, that we need keep it a secret from you or from anybody now that those two are engaged. We are all very glad, and trust it may turn out for the best. They are dear children both."

"Of course it will turn out for the best, though Alice is so perverse," added Miss Delia briskly. "Sinclair was always very fond of her, and does not care for her caprices; but I expect he will find his hands full when he gets her to manage quite by himself. Now, Rachel, you were aggrieved on a former occasion with Sunshine's bit of love-story; how do you like this one?"

"It is quite right and proper in every way—it could not be prettier or pleasanter," was the ready answer.

The young folks here presented themselves at the window, and Sinclair intimated that they were going for a gallop on the Downs. No objection being raised, Alice disappeared to don habit and hat, and presently the two were seen to ride through the gate and take the bridle-path up the fields. Miss Delia's remark as they vanished was: "I hope Alice will be back before Miss Edge arrives. I do not like the poor dressmaker to be kept waiting and losing her valuable time."

Very persistent was Miss Delia in things both great and small, but in this matter of putting on mourning for Mr. Gilsland she was likely to find her Sunshine more than a match for her.

III.

When Sinclair and Alice gained the high level of the down they turned off towards Welsbeck, where they had a delicious mile or two of springy turf before them. Alice had fought her little fight with aunt Delia and felt confident of ultimate victory, but the cause of the first shot was now to be reflected on with all its remoter and more serious consequences. She had told Sinclair in the garden the moment they met that Mr. Gilsland was dead,

and they now reverted to the same theme ; Sinclair introducing it by saying that if Mr. Gilsland were dead there was an end of any appeal to him.

"Yes ; we must try another tack," responded Alice with composed assurance. Her companion looked at her set face, perceived that the moment was not one when she would bear raillery, and asked what other tack she proposed to try.

"Lady Georgiana Warleigh," said she with prompt decision.

"Alice, it is impossible ! *She*—a perfect stranger !" exclaimed Sinclair. "My dear child, show me anything with a shadow of reason in it, and I will do your bidding to the utmost, but don't send me round the world tilting at windmills. She would set me down for a fool absolute."

"She would look wicked and guilty, and perhaps she would give up—I do not know. She could lie down a world of weaker people, but me she can never hoodwink again. She knew me that day of the strawberry party in the rectory gardens when her husband fainted ; she thrust me aside, and then I knew her too—and *she saw I knew her*. I cannot bring her distinctly into any of my recollections, but she lurks somehow behind them all."

"I wish you were rather less enigmatical, Alice,"

said Sinclair, and there was just the faintest inflection of sarcasm in his voice. He had tried this tone on Sunshine's delusions before and found it irritating—he found it dangerous now.

She gave one glance at his face and detected the slight curl of the lip that matched the tone of his voice, and the fire flashed from her heart to her eyes like the blood-crimson to her cheek, and giving her spirited horse a passionate stroke, it burst into a gallop and was away like the wind. Sinclair had just time to smile at her beautiful anger, to be vexed at the smile, at himself, when he perceived that in her reckless impetuosity, she had given her horse the rein and had lost all mastery over it. By good luck there was a long breathing stretch of turf before her with a gradual descent to a gate entering on Welsbeck-lane, and if she could guide it in the least there might be no risk of harm to her, if not,—if it swerved right or left there was nothing but certain destruction in the sheer steep of the down. Ride fast after he dared not, but there was one nearer and more abrupt descent into the road by which he might perhaps make a circuit, meet and stop her if that gate, generally open, should chance to be open now. To think and to do were simultaneous, and tearing away at a break-neck

gallop he came into the lane at a lower point; then turned, listening with a sickness of dreadful anxiety for the frantic race he expected to hear coming down the stony way.

No sound—what might not have happened? He reached the gate; there was the horse standing, flecked with foam and trembling in every limb, but there also was Alice, safe and sound on his back, stroking his neck and caressing him, but saying imperially: “Now, my beauty, you have had one gallop to please yourself, you must have another to please me.”

“I think you have both had enough,” said Sinclair, speaking in a forced voice—Oh! God, how thankful he was!

“We are not of your opinion,” answered Alice, and rode gently up the hill again. The summit reached she cried, “Now!” used her whip sharply, and was away just the same as before.

Sinclair felt very angry—men always do when they see women needlessly endangering themselves, and he followed at a trot until she, having taken her revenge on her masterful favourite, turned back at a walking pace to meet him. “*You* may not be afraid, Alice, but *I* am,” said he, and his tone sounded deeply displeased.

Sunshine made him no answer, but rode close at his side in silence, looking straight and steadily before her, until they both rode back into the stable-yard at Brookfall. She could mount and dismount perfectly well without assistance, but she had discovered of late that Sinclair liked to help her—to give her a hand up, or to lift her down; so she always stayed for his assistance. She did now. He had been wondering whether she would, and feeling a thousand vexations for having vexed her first and scolded her after; had he hesitated a second she would have slipped off and escaped, and it might have been a quarrel; but he did not, and as he lifted her from her saddle she looked at him shyly, their eyes met, and they were quite happy again.

Alice never cared to argue herself in the right with any one she loved; if hers were the fault, she liked by-and-by to be kissed and forgiven; if the fault were any one else's, when her little temper was off, she kissed and forgave—weak, perhaps, but wise; and the short way to keep friends. Sinclair preferred it to the long moods of dignity with which some ladies are said to indulge their lovers; and he felt all the more exalted when he had been the victim of a brief caprice. Perhaps he was in the wrong to start with in this instance—nothing love detests like

sarcasm—but Alice did not deem it necessary to make him feel it; on the contrary, she asked in the garden after dinner—for he and the Doctor dined at Brookfall that day—if he were *really* angry with her. Sinclair made a suitable response, and that matter was finally settled.

But, perhaps, after all hers was the wiliest way of winning; for certainly Sinclair felt in a better frame for encountering the task imposed on him than he had done before; and when Alice revived her fretful subject, and brought Lady Georgiana Warleigh up again, he only said, “But how am I to get at her, and what am I to say when I do?”

“Nothing. Listen to me—a sudden inspiration has come into my head. Lady Georgiana Warleigh is at the Hurtlemere House now, and that is near Prior’s Bank, is it not? Well, I want to go to Prior’s Bank.”

“That is practicable enough, at all events. The house is kept in order just as Mrs. Sara Grandage left it, and if you can move my aunts again so soon, I shall be proud to take you all down there. You could not wait until next spring, Alice?”

No, Alice could not wait until next spring; she knew what he meant—they were to be married next spring; but she could not wait until then. “Go to

Prior's Bank for the moor-shooting instead of Scotland," said she. Sinclair said he had intended doing so. "Then it is easy to invite us," she rejoined.

"Easier than to get the invitation accepted; however, I will make it. But I should like to have some inkling of what you propose doing when you are there?"

"I cannot tell you—I do not know. I feel drawn thither—as I dwell on the thought I feel *strongly* drawn thither. Oh, dear Sinclair, do bear with me; do be patient with me."

"I will be patient as Job, pretty sweeting! go on."

"You cannot help laughing at me. You think me silly!"

"No, I think you my own wise, bonnie——"

"It is you who are silly now!"

"At any rate we will go to Prior's Bank. Aunt Delia is coming this way, and she seems in a lively vein; let us take advantage of it to win her promise. She will be the worst to manage, I know."

The appeal was made on the spur of the moment, to be received with ejaculations of "Nonsense! Ridiculous! What would he ask next?" But having gained a hearing, he put the thing in quite a reasonable light, and succeeded so far as to prevail on Miss Flora and the Doctor to say they would

consider of it. Miss Delia continued obdurate. She never listened to so preposterous a demand in her life: she supposed it was a crazy vagary of Sunshine's, which Sinclair would gratify at everybody else's expense; but they would not get *her* to go flitting about the country like a Will-o'-the-wisp, just when they had come home from abroad too. Pshaw!"

They let her alone then, but returning to the charge again and yet again, they at length, through their importunity, wearied her into a reluctant consent. And when Sinclair started off to Hurtleddale at the beginning of August, it was quite an understood thing that the Doctor, the aunts, and Alice, should very shortly follow. Rachel Withers also was preparing at the same season to wing her flight northwards, and Alice announced to her sober-minded encouraging friend the charming arrangement that would bring them together at pleasant old Prior's Bank.

"You are off the day after to-morrow, and we go next week, Rachel. The bloom is on the heather, and I shall see Sinclair's moors for the first time in their royal purple. Aunt Flora wishes you to come to Prior's Bank for the first part of our visit. It was your home once, and you must know every inch of ground about the place. We shall need

a guide, for even Sinclair is not at home in his own house yet. Is it so very pretty? Is it as pretty as Brookfall?" This speech of Alice's was made to Rachel on the day after Sinclair Ferrand left her.

"It is quite as pretty, but in a different way," Rachel replied. "It is larger, and though there is no sea, the views are grander and more extensive; on a clear day you can see miles and miles of hill and dale, and the broad bright river like a silver ribbon winding through the midst. From the drawing-room bay window there is an exquisite peep of Hurtle Force, of the ruins in the water-meadows, and of the great old ash trees that are the pride of Prior's Bank. They call it the gem of the dale, Sunshine, and I am sure you will love it, though you will have bleaker winters and shorter summers there than we have at Claymire."

Rachel's last few words brought a rosy smile to Alice's face, a happy conscious softness into her eyes. They were in the garden at Woodland's, seated on the turf by the edge of the brook in the selfsame spot where just a year ago Mortimer Warleigh had spent with them what he called a "beautiful hour."

"Aunt Delia considers herself very ill-used in being obliged to travel again so soon, but we could

never go to Prior's Bank and leave her behind," presently said Alice. "She has never been there since she was young, and she cannot give me any account of it; but aunt Flora remembers it distinctly." She was now crouching against Rachel's knees, her face averted and her ungloved hand plucking idly at the blades of grass; a shy attitude that forewarned her companion of a confidence coming or of some inquiry having regard to her mysterious fancies. It came. "Rachel, who lives in Hurtledale besides your brother's family—what people of condition, I mean?"

"There is the old Hurtlemere House—that belongs to Sir Laurence Warleigh; and Floyd's seat—that belongs to the Grantleys; and then, except Prior's Bank, there is no gentleman's place besides until you get down to Brafferton."

"What sort of place is the Hurtlemere House, Rachel?"

"It is an ancient, stone-built mansion standing high on the side of the fell with a great pine wood at the back of it. The situation is very wild and lonely; you would think it most desolate, accustomed to the luxuriance hereabouts."

"But is it desolate in summer? It cannot surely be desolate in summer—no hilly country is."

“It is pleasanter then certainly. The views from it at any rate are glorious, especially at this time when the moors are purple, and in spring when the trees are coming out and the foliage is fresh and various and all the gorse ablaze with golden blossom. But taking it the whole year round it is a comfortless spot.”

“Why does Sir Laurence Warleigh live in it then?”

“Because he prefers it for old sake’s sake. But he is rarely there more than a month at a time; he spends his life chiefly in wandering about, and has done so ever since he lost his little daughter.

“Did his little daughter die at the Hurtlemere House?”

“No, his wife died there, but Annis died at Hastings, where he had left her living with Lady Georgiana Warleigh.

“Annis—that is a singular name; but it sounds to me as if I had heard it before—*Annis*. Rachel, I have a great anxiety to see that Hurtlemere House; I believe I shall know it. Mr. Mortimer Warleigh described the interior to me at Remagen.”

“Did he? then I am sure he would do it better than I, for he knows it better. He has lived there with his father and mother at intervals a good

deal during the last two or three years. When you visit it mind and choose a sunshiny day, for then the tarn looks beautiful with the birches drooping over it; but on a gloomy day it is black as ink."

Alice said she would, then fell into a reverie in which Rachel was not sorry to leave her undisturbed. Since Mr. Gilsland's death some very strange lights had begun to move to and fro over the troubled waters of her thoughts. Thus far she beheld nothing but shapeless suspicions and wreck of old doubts drifting hither and thither; but there was an awed sense upon her as of waiting till something greater should reveal itself, until the sea should cast up its dead, long hidden under the commotion of its waves.

IV.

The day after this conversation at Woodlands Sunshine had a letter from Sinclair,—the first lover's letter he had had the opportunity of writing to her. Rachel Withers might not have heard of the beautiful event perhaps, but that having a communication to make to Miss Flora before setting off on her journey north, she walked up to Brook-fall, and in a secluded nook of the plantation

there she found Alice, reading the precious document for perhaps the twentieth time. She did not hear Rachel's approach, neither did Rachel espy her until she came full upon her where she sat on the mossy roots of a spreading beech; then she sprang up blushing like the morning, and exclaiming: "Oh, Rachel, how you startled me! I was reading my letter from Sinclair—you will see him before I shall."

"Yes," responded Rachel and waited, naturally supposing the remark was a prelude to some message or commission; but no, it was simply a little thought outspoken by accident, implying a gentle envy of the great privilege—Rachel would see Sinclair before she did. As nothing came of the pause but a low blissful sigh, Rachel grew aware of her mistake, and proceeded to speak of the lovely weather and other convenient general topics; the only topics Sunshine's mind could embrace at such a moment. She slipped her hand under Rachel's arm and sauntered dreamily along beside her, answering with monosyllables and inarticulate murmurs until they both fell into a sociable silence, and so reached the wicket into the Brookfall gardens. Here Alice endowed her companion with a kiss, and then fled to a clematis-buried bower to

con her dear letter again, while Rachel went up to the house to talk prose to the aunts.

She found Miss Delia in a state of lofty, obtrusive resignation. "You set off to-morrow, Rachel, do you? I cannot understand all this racing and chasing about the country! We are off again next week, and Sinclair departed the day before yesterday almost without warning. I think everybody is gone crazy, but if I am to be driven to Prior's Bank the moment I am peaceably settled at home again, all I can say is that somebody else may take the trouble of it; for I will not put a finger to a single box," proclaimed the old lady, and then arranged herself with great demonstration of ease and comfort in her favourite easy chair.

"There is no need that you should, dear Delia; Hawkins will attend to everything," said her sister soothingly.

"Hawkins is quite sufficiently occupied with Alice. I told the indolent puss only this morning that she ought to have been born to a great fortune; for she will soon want a maid all to herself."

"And Sinclair will gladly afford her one, I have no doubt."

"Humph!" murmured Miss Delia disapprovingly,

for this was quite a different view from that she meant to offer.

But Miss Flora insisted on regarding everything from the bright side just now. "There was a letter for Sunshine from him this morning, the dear fellow, and it was pretty to see her delight. First she kissed it, then she crushed it against her frock, then she tossed it up into the air and caught it as it came down, laughing and blushing—"

"And looking a perfect goose," added Miss Delia with an abortive attempt to be grim. "I really never knew how silly girls could be until I made Sunshine's acquaintance; nothing would ever astonish me again that I might hear of them. It is lucky Sinclair does not care for a quiet life; I would not be in his shoes for a very pretty penny!"

"Oh, Delia dear, the child is quite natural; she is happy and she cannot help showing it," pleaded Miss Flora. "I congratulate myself more and more every hour that Sinclair and she are so strongly attached to each other; I do not expect we shall have any more of her *moods* now. He will make up to her for everybody else, you will see."

"I don't wish him to make up to her for *us* after all our trouble and anxiety—but that is the

way of the world ; parents and silly people bring up children and somebody else steps in and has all the pleasure of them ! Alice is a dear girl, and that I never seek to deny, but she is very, *very* wilful and obstinate. Only think of those two black dresses, Rachel—”

“Perhaps you need not tell Rachel *that*, Delia ; it was naughty,” interposed Miss Flora with hasty deprecation.”

“I *shall*—neither Rachel nor any one else would ever believe it without ; my dear,” she went on turning away determinedly from her sister ; “the two mourning dresses for Mr. Gilsland that you heard us differing about the other day, came home from Miss Edge last night, and were laid out on Alice’s bed with their belongings all in order for Hawkins to try if they fitted ; and when Alice saw them she flew into one of her tantrums and quite terrified our maid. Hawkins ran away out of sight of her violence, and when she ventured back where do you think those dresses were ?” Rachel did not dare hazard a guess. “I’ll tell you, my dear,” proceeded the old lady wagging her head ; “yes, and I shall tell *Sinclair* too when we see him ; they were in her bath, my dear, over head and ears in her great bath, as I may say, and the black dye all

running out of the paramatta! When Hawkins began to cry shame, as was quite natural, Alice serenely bade her, 'Take away that trash;' and when I tried to remonstrate and show her what wicked, wanton waste of good clothes it was, she just said, pouting her pretty face at me—she deserved to have her ears boxed, she did! 'Kiss me, auntie Dee, and don't be cross. I told you I would not wear them.' Now, I don't think you would find a parallel to that amongst all the girls of your acquaintance, Rachel Withers. I don't know her match."

"And I suppose there was nothing left for you to do but kiss her," replied Rachel, with difficulty keeping her countenance.

"Well, no, there was not. Now that she has Sinclair always to fly to it is no use battling with her, for he takes her part against us always. He will never cure her of her caprices and wilfulness either. I am sure he will not."

"He always seems to enjoy them more or less; and if he cannot tame her nobody can. Time may do it; I trust trouble will not; for she had her share, poor darling, when she was little," said Miss Flora tenderly.

"Mr. More would have managed her—he would

have made of her a solid, estimable character. *Yes, I maintain it.*"

"Dear Delia! She would have managed him out of his senses and into a lunatic asylum in a month! Recollect what frenzies she got into at the very idea of marrying him. I think you must have been a little mad yourself ever to fancy such a match as that could possibly succeed!"

"*Mad*, not at all mad! It would have done very well. I do not wish things otherwise than they are *now*; but there are *many* far more unlikely marriages than that would have been made up in the world, which nevertheless turn out very happily. You are as romantic as a girl of sixteen *still*, Sister Flo'!"

Sister Flo' took the imputation very meekly. She had been blithe and tender in her youth, and had had her own little love story in her day, but Miss Delia was always a fussy, practical body, superior to vanities, and prone to managing people, and setting the world to rights in her own way; which was occasionally an over persistent, irritating way, better adapted to machinery of wood and iron, than to beings of flesh and blood and human passions.

Alice's delinquencies disposed of, the journey to

Hurtledale was reverted to, and Rachel was begged to make her arrangements at the rectory, so that she might spend a few days with her friends at Prior's Bank when they first arrived there. Sinclair would have seen her to give the invitation himself, but he had been so much engaged at the last that he could find no spare moment, and had left the message with his aunts instead. Rachel gave a conditional promise, and then they parted, not to meet again until they met in her old home.

END OF PART THE FOURTH.

PART FIFTH.

FOUND.



CHAPTER THE FIRST.

LADY GEORGINA'S AGONY.

Leave her to heaven,
 And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
 To prick and sting her.—SHAKSPEARE.

I.

ON arriving at the rectory Rachel Withers to her great pleasure and surprise found Arthur Hill and Grace staying there, and the two boys both at home for their holidays. Altogether they were a houseful. Rachel was put into her own old room, and it was much such an evening as that when her brother John and she came back nearly twenty years ago to make it their home. The open window showed her the same prospect as it did then—the purple moors, the cornfields ripening to the harvest, the full summer

foliage, the silvery rush of the Force; but what changes within and what changes amongst all she loved! It is always rather pathetic to see one's faded face and grizzled hair reflected in the little mirror that once showed us a blooming and sprightly youth. Rachel had never seriously thought how much she was altered until that evening when she was dressing before hers, and then it struck her quite grotesquely, "Gracious," murmured she, "how ancient I begin to look!" And she did begin to look ancient. One or two recent events had left their marks on her face.

This old room of hers was so sunny that Katherine had chosen it for a nursery when Dicky was born, but now that the babies were grown up into big children it had been re-converted into a sleeping-room, and all the former furniture was reinstated in its former place. "We call it our *odd*-room now, but I knew you would feel most at home in it," said Katherine as she ushered her in at the familiar, low door. "You see, John has not enlarged the house, as he used to threaten, and he never will now; for I like it best as it is." She looked quite young and gay and as handsome as ever—her two immense boys might have been her brothers instead of her sons.

All at the dear old rectory seemed so cheerful and buoyant that Rachel felt herself in an atmosphere of as pure content and of as full happiness as this world ever gives. They assembled round the dinner-table, children and all, on that first evening, as blithe and pleasant a family party as could be found in the length and the breadth of the land. Arthur Hill had no native gloom in him and his wife had caught some of his gaiety: she was as lightsome again as she used to be and far more given to lively conversation; while John Withers and Katherine were a pattern pair of married lovers whom all their kinsfolk and friends admired. If the sisters had passed a forlorn childhood and lonely youth the lack of happiness had been made up to them with interest since. Lady Foulis was a true prophetess when she told them they were having their worst days at Whinstane, and bade them look forward to the coming of happier times elsewhere. And her hints to Rachel had been justified, too—touching the unsureness of the future. Poor Rachel, poor sober Rachel! who had been so glad-some in her heart during that dreary visit to the Tower, and was now the loneliest and dullest of them all! So the wheel of fortune whirls us round, sometimes sunny-side up, sometimes down in the

dust and the dark—and we must even take the rough with the smooth, the shade with the shine, and make ourselves philosophical and contented !

But notwithstanding the merry talk and merrier laughter there was a skeleton rattling its bones in the background that night, and many ears at the rectory were awake to its ominous jingle. Rumour was no longer whispering in Hurtle Dale, but crying aloud, open-mouthed and insolent. The last people to hear her voice are always those most concerned in what she says. Lady Georgiana Warleigh had heard *nothing*, but she suspected *everything*, and this family gathering at the rectory—which was, in fact, purely accidental—she suspected most of all. What did it mean ? Why were they all come together just at this season ?

On the morning succeeding Rachel Withers' arrival, Lady Georgiana came down to the rectory betimes accompanied by Mortimer to pay her a visit. She looked very haggard and restless, but she met Rachel with her cordial airy manner, complimented her on her healthful face, congratulated her on her pleasant tour abroad, and hoped she would experience the beneficial effects of it through the winter ; talking fast and fluently, and scarcely allowing Rachel to edge in a word. When this

had gone on for some time, she made an excuse for despatching Mortimer to join his cousins out of doors, and they were left to themselves in the drawing-room. Rachel experienced an indefinable sense of uneasiness when thus left alone with Lady Georgiana; she perceived that something more than ordinary was in her mind; she was a subtle, secret woman, and her visage was a very mask for hiding emotion, but while they were talking she several times pressed her handkerchief to her mouth and held it there, and her glance was expressive of the keenest nervous alarm. She gave Rachel the idea that she was in a state of violently suppressed agitation and dread; and also that she was conscious some great thing depended on her exercising self-control. She was dressed with her usual scrupulous simplicity and grace, and all her voluntary gestures were those of a perfectly assumed ease; only a consummate actress could have carried on for so many years with success the drama she had sustained; but now that she heard the footsteps of retribution echoing close and fast after her vain flight, nature overpowered art, and she betrayed again and again to those who were on the watch that Fate had run her out of breath, and that in a very little while her last strength would be spent.

"Now tell me about your travels," she began as soon as they were alone. "Mortimer wrote that he had met you at several places on the Rhine, and that you appeared to be enjoying your independence amazingly. Did you and your friend quite agree? A solitary tour has its charms, but if you go double, your companion must either suit you to the core, or become speedily a thorn in the flesh. But I suppose you two, having known each other from your youth upwards, are as familiar with each other's quips and cranks of character as you are with your own. It must have been extremely pleasant. I could find in my heart to envy you! No ties, no troubles, no anything to interfere with the delightful novelty. Well, and where did you sail from to come home? From Boulogne, I suppose, as that is the shortest and easiest passage."

"No, we went by Dieppe, and through Normandy; so in returning we took the route through Belgium by way of making the most of our holiday to the end."

"Ah, you sailed from Antwerp to London then? Interesting old city Antwerp is, but the crossing to England very bad. I made it once, but I should

never choose to make it again. We had a very rough night out."

"But we did not sail from Antwerp; we took the boat from Ostend to Dover, and that is a disagreeable passage too."

Lady Georgiana was seated opposite to the light, and Rachel with her back to it; at the name of Ostend Lady Georgiana's eyes blinked—it might be from the dazzle of the sun, but it was more probably from a sudden pang; however, she made the glitter on the glass her excuse for changing her seat, and took a chair where the green curtains threw a ghastly shadow on her pallid face, and made it impossible to detect any fluctuations of feeling which she might not have force enough to hide.

"From Ostend you sailed—detestable place, Ostend," then said she in her dulcet tones. "Pray what could take you to Ostend?"

"My friend's longing for the sea. She makes her home in London, and she wished for a few days' breeze and bathing before plunging into its dusty toils again."

"Really—very nice and convenient indeed." Lady Georgiana was reflecting—Rachel was reflecting too. After a few seconds' pause, Lady Geor-

giana asked at what date they were at Ostend, and if the weather was agreeable. She was told that it was at the beginning of July, and that it was very wild and dismal weather for the season. "And of course you did not continue long? The Germans go there because it is the only place they have, but you who know Claymire and all our lovely Devonshire coasts, could hardly be inclined to linger."

"No, we did not enjoy it much, and I should certainly never care to revisit it," said Rachel. She began to perceive that this close interrogatory had a design in it; Lady Georgiana's next words unfolded it, and made her heart leap.

"I read in *The Times* not long ago that poor Mr. Gilsland was dead at Ostend. We attended his church once. What a very eloquent man he was, but sadly unprincipled. You used to know him—did you happen to see him while you were there?"

"Once for a few minutes only. It was on the Marine Parade, one very windy afternoon, when we had gone down to see the English boat come in. He looked very ill then—yes, I knew that he was dead. Miss Delia Ferrand received a mourning card from his widow, and she mentioned

it to me." Deceitful Rachel! she had told no one, nor did she mean to tell any one, how she had followed the forlorn, forsaken wretch to his grave in the wind and the rain.

"Miss Delia Ferrand? Oh, yes, of course, the melancholy intelligence would be sent to her as having charge of his niece. Did you know, Rachel, that my poor boy took a fancy to that child's pretty face last summer, and nothing would satisfy him but he must follow her abroad this spring? But it was to no purpose—he came back as he went. Sinclair Ferrand had used his opportunities and secured her beforehand—rather an unusual ending between two young people who have been almost brought up together. I suppose it is a suitable marriage; I liked her appearance, and if Mortimer had had better luck neither his father nor I would have regretted it."

"Every one approves of the match," said Rachel. "They are deeply attached; they are young, and they are good. Alice has been like a daughter to the ladies at Brookfall. Mortimer is light-hearted, and will find him a new love by-and-by."

"No fear of it! He has not taken his disappointment *au grand sérieux*." Here ensued a brief silence; Lady Georgiana's dread lest Rachel might

have had any communication with or from Mr. Gilsland at Ostend was set at rest; but she had further inquiries to make, and she next introduced the subject of Prior's Bank and of Sinclair Ferrand's being there at present; preluding it with an allusion to Sir Laurence's extensions of territory in Hurtleale.

"My husband used to say that his brother's property here would never be complete until he could add to it the gem of Hurtleale; but when Mr. Bond negotiated with Philip Grantley lately for the purchase of some land adjacent he was assured that Prior's Bank would not be sold on any terms as the owner himself intended living there. I understand young Ferrand is here now, though we have none of us seen him. I tell Mortimer it would only be courteous if he called. Will he settle here when he marries? He was all for wide-world travel when I had a little gossip with him once during our stay at Claymire, but perhaps a wife will change his ways."

Rachel could not enlighten her—she had heard very little talk of the marriage. In spite of all her efforts to be at ease, a certain guarded formality would creep over her manner while talking to Lady Georgiana, who seemed to be endeavouring to sift

her—to find out if she had anything to hide. Rachel had nothing to hide, but she caught herself speculating more than once on what it could be that she was supposed to have. John and Katherine came in before the sitting was at an end, but Lady Georgiana did not remain long after they appeared; and the few minutes she did remain were taken up with inquiries about her husband. As she was shaking hands at the last she begged Rachel to go up to luncheon at the Hurtlemere House on the following day. “Oliver would like to see you, and hear about your travels. He has so few pleasures now that it is a charity when any one will come up for an hour or two and talk to him,” said she.

Rachel had no excuse ready, and therefore she acquiesced, though she would have been glad to evade the visit. She did not relish the close catechizations to which Lady Georgiana subjected her because she could not see their drift. This morning's talk had confused her a good deal, and present thinking did not make the confusion clear. But she took a walk with Sacharissa Tulip and the boys over the fell, and that did her a benefit; strengthened her and steadied her for what was to come when she got back to the rectory again and

found John and Katherine, Arthur Hill and Grace sitting in secret conclave in the study with locked doors.

John came out and took her in amongst the other white faces, just saying, "Take off your bonnet and lay it down here, Rachel. We have something dreadful to tell you. A rumour is flying all round the dales that Sir Laurence Warleigh's poor little wildling is alive. There—don't scream or faint, but just sit down and try if you can throw any light on it; for none of us know whence it has arisen, or what spark has kindled up this little fire and much smoke."

"If she be alive I know her—if she be alive, Alice Gilsland and Annis Warleigh are one and the same person," said Rachel, speaking slowly, deliberately, with the voice of full conviction.

"Alice Gilsland—that is the girl Lady Georgiana has been so anxious for Mortimer to marry," added Grace.

"Then the whole plot is out," said Arthur Hill, and everybody was silent, each one looking on another with pallid dismay. The whole plot was out.

Upon Rachel it came in an instant, like a flash—a revelation. Her heart bounded as if it had been

let go out of a vice, and all the dead facts that had been accumulating in her mind, silently, insensibly, ever since she looked through the old county history for the Lady Eleanour Seamer whose portrait was a likeness of Alice, and found that her maiden-name was *Gwynne*, sprang up quickened into perfect life! Her face became the colour of pale grey marble, and when the silence was broken and every tongue began to question her at once, she could only articulate a faint supplication that they would let her get away to her own room, and give her time to *think it out*.

II.

Shut up alone in that retreat, Rachel threw open the window, locked the door, and secure from interruption, set her mind to work. She endeavoured to feel her way through the web mesh by mesh; to arrange her recollections in order; to marshal her facts in rank. First returned Mrs. Lupton's garrulous prattle, and her story, distinct, entire; then Lady Georgiana's few trivial sounding words of information about the nurse and the doctor which had tinged her mind with suspicion anew after it had been free for years from the doubts that Bittersweet had discouraged as dangerous.

Then she recalled certain incidents of the last twelve years which wove themselves into a perfect network. A thousand trifles, each one light as air, added themselves into a complete whole within the circle of her memory, until the sum of them grew into an invincible conviction that Annis, the poor little gipsy long mourned as dead, and Alice, the bonnie Sunshine of Brookfall, were *one—identical*.

The very steps that had been taken to impede discovery now helped it. So many things inexplicable at the time of their occurrence now explained themselves—the peculiar familiarity of intimacy with Mr. Gilsland, the straitened means of Oliver Warleigh and his wife; Alice's repudiation of her mother's supposititious miniature; her wild-sounding talk on the downs, which was after all the *truth* glimmering through a haze. And earlier circumstances than these—the avoidance of her godmamma Grandage and herself by the Gilslands at Amiens when they were removing the child from her temporary concealment in Paris; the pitiful sketch of Annis at her barred prison window; the poor little waif's flight from her merciless jailers at Welsbeck and all the hurried tragedy of Mr. Gilsland's death. And last but not least, Alice's persistent faith in what were called her delusions, and the mutual recognition which she

asserted to have passed between herself and Lady Georgiana when they met at Claymire in the rectory gardens after the lapse of a dozen years. There was not an essential link wanting. Rachel's great marvel when she held the complete chain in her grasp was that she had not seen it growing.

And then there was the telling of the whole wicked story over to John and Arthur, Katherine and Grace: and she told it. Katherine heard it, her hands twisted together, and uttering every now and then inarticulate cries of suffering. She was thinking of her brother Oliver, and of his most wicked and miserable wife. During his long affliction she had grown very pitying and tender over him.

"Oh, Rachel," said she at the end, "*if it be true*, it is very terrible; *if it be true*, they did the child a cruel, cruel wrong, but it has brought forth to them none but bitterest fruit!"

"No; whatever she may have suffered, God knows they have suffered tenfold more!" responded John.

They sat silent a little while after this, each one endeavouring to grasp the facts as Rachel's memory and imagination had pieced them together. At length Arthur Hill asked how she, who had known Alice now two or three years intimately, never came

to discover the truth before. "How can I tell—I did not *discover* it finally," replied she. "I am no plotter or hunter after secrets. Suspicion seems to me to have been converging towards the light from every side; I have no evidence to give beyond what you have now heard; but it is enough."

"Enough, yes! It cannot be shut up in the dark any longer; the whole disgraceful fraud must be searched into, let the results be what they may," said John. "It has triumphed too long already."

"Oh, dear John, let nothing be done in haste," pleaded Katherine. "Wait and see; Lady Georgiana says Mortimer has a fancy for the poor child—if they could marry, would not that right it all without need of blazoning it to the world?"

John shook his head, smiling pitifully over his wife's womanish device for righting so great a wrong, and then turning to Rachel he asked what Alice herself remembered. "She was between four and five years old when she went to Hastings; she must have been fully five when rescued from the Gilslands—she should have her recollections."

"And so she has," said Rachel. Then she recited Alice's repudiation of the false miniature, her rejection of all Mr. Gilsland's accounts of her father, and her romantic, hazy reminiscences of her home

with him. "But think how cruelly they used her," she went on; "they tried to crush all life out of her memory, and that long sickness at Brookfall would help their malice. She fully believes that her father is alive, and I have little doubt but that she would recognize him did they meet."

"Laurence is abroad, contented and unsuspecting," interposed Katherine. "It is not *certain*, John; it may half of it be the tissue-work of Rachel's imagination; Lady Foulis is doting, and wilder tales than this have been bruited abroad which have turned out false when put to the proof. Think what agony for Laurence, what shame for Oliver, for all of us, if the dreadful accusation were made and found incapable of being sustained."

"My Kate, you believe it yourself," was John's conclusive answer. "We have a work of justice, of restitution put upon us to do, and we must do it without fear or favour. Only the means must be well considered first. Laurence is in Holland—him we must summon. *She* is coming to Prior's Bank in a week—a meeting must be the test; perhaps it will be the quickest and least painful test, from what Rachel says."

"You will warn them at the Hurtlemere House first—don't let Laurence see Oliver in his first rage,"

said Grace, who had not spoken yet. "And there are those kind old ladies who have taken care of her to be thought of."

"And Sinclair Ferrand," added Rachel; and then she told them of Alice's engagement to the nephew of her benefactresses.

"Moral certainties are very well as far as they go, but they are not evidence," said Arthur Hill. "If the grave were opened and found to contain the remains of a child tallying in age with Annis; if the meeting on which you rely so much were not crowned by a recognition; and if the instruments of the abduction kept faith with each other and dared you for proofs, I do not see where you would be. There have been mysterious disappearances and re-appearances before this which have afforded a good deal of legal fighting ground. Mrs. Lupton looks good metal—she will tell no tales; and Doctor Frith, unless his countenance sorely belie him, is capable of worse things than giving false certificates of death; while Gilsland is gone out of the reach of making tardy amends by confession. Before taking any other step I should, were I you, call Mr. Bond into council. He will advise as to the likeliest and safest measures. Meanwhile we had best be dumb, and go on as heretofore. We can-

not challenge Oliver or Lady Georgiana on pure hearsay."

To this every one acceded; and the next morning when Rachel, in most reluctant redemption of her promise, walked up to luncheon at the Hurtlemere House, John Withers and Arthur Hill rode over to the old lawyer's at Brafferton.

III.

Oliver Warleigh appeared to Rachel Withers very much broken and wasted indeed since she saw him last in London, though Lady Georgiana protested that he was stronger than he had been for a long while, and in better spirits. He said to her when she went in, wringing her hand with his yellow skeleton fingers as he spoke: "I have had a long agony, Rachel, a very long agony; but something whispers me that it is drawing near to an end now."

"You must not give way, sir; there's years of life in you yet," shrilled Mrs. Lupton, who was standing by his chair in the attitude of attentive nurse. He was not deaf, but she always raised her voice as if he were, and stooped her mouth to his ear, from which he visibly recoiled as if he expected her to bite.

Lady Georgiana was seated at her work-table in the window. "He desponds sometimes, Rachel, and it cannot be wondered at," said she, looking wearily towards him. She was busy on a fine piece of tapestry, of which she must have had an acre put away somewhere; for it was her constant occupation, and never appeared made up or put to any use. Rachel had never seen her at home that she had not a large square of canvas and a basket of bright wools and silks before her. Who know how many aching terrors that monotonous labour helped her to smother! She spoke again. "Tell Oliver about your holiday, Rachel; it will divert his mind from dwelling on his own sensations for half an hour, and that will be so much gained. You would like to hear what Rachel Withers saw and did abroad, would you not, Oliver?"

He inclined his head in courteous assent, but did not appear to listen after she had spoken a few sentences. It would have had to be a much more vital subject than any traveller's talk to attract his attention away from himself for more than a minute or two now. His eyes fixed themselves on the smouldering logs that heaped the wide range; for he was so chilly in his feebleness that he needed a fire during the hottest days of summer. Perhaps the

tone of Rachel's soft voice going on in a continuous strain of chat had a soothing effect, and enabled him to give himself up to his own train of thought more entirely than if he had been addressed at intervals only; so, at least, she fancied from the set quietness that presently stole over his countenance. He seemed rapt away into a world of his own, where his gnawing miseries grew dull and lethargic. He passed whole days now sunk in this semblance of deep reverie, which, if it could have been dived into, would, perhaps, have been found sheer vacancy. Body, mind, and spirit were all alike worn down to the lowest ebb. It seemed as if deliverance by death could not be far distant from him.

While Rachel engaged her master, Mrs. Lupton retired to her own place and took up her sewing with an air of perfect peace and comfort. What a woman that was! Sleek, fair, plump, even comely to the casual glance; but her eyes were hard and cold as steel, and the lines about her mouth might have been carved with the graver instead of by a natural smile. She was a woman who with a purpose to serve would hesitate at no cruelty, no crime, no desperate, long-sustained iniquity, and she looked like what she was.

It was not until Rachel had been full an hour in

this room, from which Oliver Warleigh now rarely stirred save to his bed in that which adjoined it, before luncheon was announced; and then Lady Georgiana and she went downstairs together, leaving him alone with Mrs. Lupton. Rachel observed that he watched them away, and that his eyes expressed terror of being thus left—the terror of a helpless person abandoned to a torturer.

They sat down to the table by themselves, for Mortimer was not in the house; but he made his appearance before they had finished, announcing as he joined them that he had met Sinclair Ferrand on the moor, and had walked round by the Force with him. His mother received this intelligence calmly, but an awful ghastliness overspread her countenance when her son went on with heedless inobservance to say that Dr. Ferrand and all the Brookfall party were expected at Prior's Bank in a few days—evidently she had not heard a whisper of this before. She felt the net closing round her inevitably now; Rachel averted her gaze from her—great as had been her crime, her cruelty, pity for her was at that moment the uppermost feeling in her mind.

“Why did you not tell me this before?” said Lady Georgiana suddenly in a voice that made her shrink; so forced and yet so stifled with thick

thronging agonies. "Why did you not tell me this yesterday when we were speaking of her!" Rachel looked up and their eyes met; and in that instant, though not a word was uttered, a whole revelation was made. There was no longer any secret about Alice as between those two. Lady Georgiana was self-betrayed and she knew it.

Mortimer, startled into attention by his mother's tone and manner, intercepted that swift glance which told so much, but he did not speak. The colour fled out of his face too, and he looked from one to the other with vivid, silent inquiry as to what it all meant. Lady Georgiana was the first to recover her composure. "You eat nothing, Rachel," said she, and Rachel as quietly responded that she would not take anything more, she thanked her. "Are you afraid we shall poison you?" asked Lady Georgiana again, then laughed her harsh laugh which could conceal so much.

They all rose together from the table and passed into the hall, the door of which stood open with the full mid-day glow pouring in on the chequered marble of the floor. Lady Georgiana paused a moment meditative, and then invited Rachel to come out into the garden. "There are peaches ripe on the south-wall," said she; "and they are always best

plucked and eaten when the sun is hot upon them." Rachel obeyed her behests, and when she said again, "Take my arm, Rachel," she took it without hesitation.

If any one had warned her beforehand that thus and thus would she behave towards a woman who had been guilty of such stupendous wickedness as had Oliver Warleigh's wife, she would have scouted the accusation vehemently. She could only have imagined herself shrinking away from her with loathing or denouncing her with horror, but the sacredness of suffering humanity was in her still, and that overpowered all sentiments in Rachel's soul but one of awed, wondering compassion. The judgment of God was so close upon her now that mortal hatred of her guilt shrank away and hid its face from the spectacle of her punishment.

Mortimer followed into the garden and gathered the fruit for them from the sunny wall, and they ate it, walking leisurely to and fro under the hedge of clipped holly that screened the west winds from the lower terrace—ate it, and talked about it as if that dreadful quarter of an hour were a pleasant interval of idleness and nothing more. The heat and glare were, however, very great, and Lady Georgiana proposed by-and-by that they should go indoors; and

leaving Mortimer below they returned to Oliver Warleigh's room. Then again did his wife apply herself mechanically to her tapestry, and again was poor Rachel invited to amuse the invalid with her reminiscences of travel until three o'clock struck, and she could decently take leave. If Lady Georgiana had one doubt of her knowledge left, Rachel wished fervently that she should retain it, and not a single word of explanation or inquiry passed between them to clear up that glance of terrible intelligence they had exchanged.

As Rachel was bidding Oliver Warleigh good-by, his lips formed the almost soundless words, "*John*, I want to see *John*," with low, tremulous, beseeching energy. No one overheard him but herself; for Lady Georgiana and Lupton were at the lower end of the room, as far away from the fire as they could get; a pressure of his hand was the only response she ventured on, but he understood it, and gave her a stealthy gesture of acknowledgment in reply.

Mistress Dobie put herself in the way to have a few words with Rachel as she was leaving the house.

"What do you think of Master Oliver, Miss Rachel? I think he's ower beset wi' doctors an' nurses to ha' half a chance. Poor mortal man! God knows why he is *as* he is, an' mayhap t' Auld 'Un

knaws, but nare a ane o' us can guess." The dame peered at Rachel with shrewd intelligence as if, with encouragement, she could have said much more than she did, but Rachel declined to take the hint. It was not likely that Sir Laurence Warleigh's brother could have come to his present mysterious and miserable condition without a world of back-stairs talk and speculation having been lavished upon him; and notwithstanding Mistress Dobie's disclaimer she had a tolerably just suspicion of what had brought it about; she was too shrewd and clear-witted a woman to have lived for eight or ten months in hostility with Mrs. Lupton, and not to have discovered the secret of her power and influence over Lady Georgiana Warleigh.

Rachel met Mortimer loitering near the gate, as she believed on purpose to speak to her, but if so his courage failed him; for though he walked nearly all the way to the rectory with her he never once referred to the scene at luncheon. He looked perplexed and out of spirits; up to that day he had lived without a suspicion, but now he perceived some danger dimly and darkly threatening his mother, but of what nature or whence coming he could not conjecture even yet.

IV.

Mr. Bond was thunderstruck by the communication which John Withers and Arthur Hill made to him. At first he exclaimed that the story was too wildly improbable to be true, but being reminded that not one of them in Hurtleale had seen Annis *dead*—not even himself, though he had gone to Hastings for the very purpose of looking after her and watching that all was right—he began to blame himself and say, how should he answer to his master for his cowardly neglect? But for that, the conspiracy might have been detected at the first step, and those wicked women circumvented. He asked time to consider of the measures that must be taken to verify the story, and promised to go over to the rectory on the following morning after breakfast, and this he did accordingly, arriving there to find confirmation strong of every particular that had been told him on the previous day.

This confirmation had come to Rachel Withers in the shape of a confession written by Mr. Gilsland shortly before his death. He began it by expressing his disappointment at her non-appearance on the Monday according to her promise, and went on in the supposi-

tion that she did not intend to redeem it; or that she had left Ostend. It was very brief and very explicit; almost the only novelty in it being the information that the coffin buried in Hurtleddale churchyard as that of Annis contained no mortal relics at all. There was a touch of grotesque vanity in its conclusion. It was one of his bitterest regrets, he said, that he had made Rachel's life so desolate and wretched. But it never was *desolate* or *wretched*; perhaps she had borne her few trials as lightly as ever a woman in the world; for she had always set herself with pious fortitude to endure what could not be evaded, and it is our struggles that gall us often more than our bonds. She now found herself under the necessity of telling the incidents of her few days at Ostend.

“Poor wretch, and he had not even the consolation of knowing himself not utterly deserted!” remarked Katherine, and no one ever touched on that part of the subject again.

The letter had been detained amongst others and forwarded to Mr. Gilsland's widow; it having, as it appeared, no address upon it when he died and left his work undone. At least, it was a feminine hand that had addressed it to Rachel at Claymire, whence Hanson had forwarded it to Hurtleddale.

“It will prevent a struggle or shorten it at least,” remarked Arthur Hill. “I am thankful one of the crew has confessed.”

And then, prepared for whatever might occur, John Withers set off to the Hurltemere House for his interview with Oliver Warleigh, and a most sad and terrible interview it was. Lady Georgiana opposed his seeing her husband at first, but when he firmly insisted, she penetrated his designs, lost all self-command and exclaimed, “Then Rachel has told you her fancies? But she has no proof—I defy any of you to bring evidence against us that will hold water!”

John’s calmly crushing reply was,—

“Lady Georgiana, we need neither proof nor evidence, for you will bring no opposition to bear against the facts. Mr. Gilsland cleansed his conscience before he died by confessing the whole base conspiracy.”

“It was *he* betrayed us then, the vapouring, lying wretch! I knew he was not to be trusted, nor Frith either—wild horses would not have dragged it from Lupton or from me!” And for several minutes the baffled woman walked about the room, lost to sense in her rage, grinding her teeth and uttering the inarticulate animal sounds of a passion and an agony

too great for words. With a desperate effort she recovered her self-control at last and stood still, her bosom heaving, her visage livid with suppressed emotion, and said with her sneer of bitterest contempt, "Oliver has had a long hankering to cleanse his conscience too ; since that hound has done it, let him have what shred of peace such confession can give him. He would have been beforehand with Gilsland if he had not had me at his elbow all these years to bolster up his courage." And so she led the way to her husband's room at the door of which stood Mrs. Lupton.

"It is over, Lupton. You can do the best that remains for yourself and go," said Lady Georgiana, addressing the nurse.

Mrs. Lupton stared at her patroness for a moment, horribly dismayed, and then asked, "Who was it told—Frith or Gilsland?" Being informed that it was Mr. Gilsland, she answered, while a significant grin writhed her lips away from her shining teeth, "He is dead already—so much the better for him perhaps." A demon revealed itself in her countenance at that moment ; she would not have stuck at murder just then to compass a revenge.

John Withers could not enter the room until she stood away from the door, which she was in no haste

to do ; her reign of terror was over, but she had too much confidence in her personal resources to beat a cowardly retreat.

"I shall always respect and admire you, Lady Georgiana Warleigh," said she with a grave assumption that her respect and admiration were desirable things. "You have stood firm from beginning to end—firmer than I looked for ; and if there had been only us two in the secret as I proposed, Doomsday might have told a tale, but it would never have got out before." And with that she stepped aside from the doorway and let John pass her.

Oliver Warleigh had been wide awake to the unusual disturbance and was staring affrighted towards the entrance when John went in—his cowering figure, hands clutching the sides of his chair and head thrust forward, all hideously expressive of the terror that had laid hold on him. When he saw who his visitor was he fell back and essayed to smile—a feeble, dismal effort that ended in a whining cry.

"I am living in hell, John, I am living in hell, and they have sent for Frith again !" whispered he. "I thought he was come—was it only you talking to Lupton at the door? Keep him away if you can—*she* is always promising to give me a dose when he is here ; and she will some day when my lady is out of

the way. She uses me shamefully, shamefully ! I hate her !” The vehemence of his passion lifted him for a moment erect in his chair, but only to shrink down again more abased and fear-stricken than ever, as he went on, “ You are a good man, John, and can know nothing of the temptations the devil puts in the road of the wicked. If I tell you what we did many, many years since you will not be hard on me, will you, though you are a priest ?” He waited panting for the assurance and then went on in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible. “ I would have told Laurence when he came home from America, but they took me abroad and shut me up for six years. *His child did not die at Hastings of that fever* ; we got her conveyed away, and in the coffin we buried here there was nothing but a swathed log of wood—if you have it taken up you will find I speak the truth. They say she really *is* dead now, but they have told me so many lies that may be a lie too. I saw her once in Paris, again in London, and at Claymire last summer, and they swear I was mistaken—but I know better. It was Gipsy and no other.”

“ Would it be any relief to you to hear that she was not dead ?” John asked him.

“ I cannot tell—it would make Laurence amends. But there is poor Mortimer—he has been brought up

to think himself heir to Whinstane and Penslaven—but still, *is she alive?*” John then told him that she was. “Would Laurence know her?” was the next inquiry. John thought it extremely probable he might. “I hated her, the little serpent, but I am glad she is not dead—yes, it is *safest*,” replied Oliver. “Mortimer will not take so much harm, for he does not care about money. It is the dishonour, the shame he will feel. My lady says cynically she does not know how we come to have a son so sensitive. They have tried to persuade me that I am *mad*, John; but I have been sane enough not to escape one wrench of the screw they have put upon me!” And thus he moaned on, poor feeble wretch; not too weak to imagine a crime, but ever too weak to act it out; earning for his guerdon in the end nothing but the scorn and tyranny of his mean and miserable associates in guilt. At this moment even he pleaded with John not to betray him to his nurse, lest she should take on him her long-threatened revenge for his suspicion-breeding fears.

John bade him set his mind at rest, and promised that she should molest him no more; the secret had been oozing out for some time and many had guessed it before he spoke. He also told him of Mr. Gilsland's confession, and then he felt rather than heard him

ask the question, "Does Laurence know it?" John said No, but he must now be immediately warned and summoned home, whereupon Oliver fell into such a trembling and faintness that John was relieved to see Lady Georgiana enter; rigid, emotionless, as if she were formed compact of ice and iron.

Before she spoke her husband conjectured her design—she was come to tell him they must leave the Hurtlemere House instantly.

"No, no, no!" shrieked he piteously. "I will not go away with Lupton any more; John, stand between me and that fiend."

"Will you remain here and meet your brother Laurence in his own house? Will you dare *that*?" demanded his wife.

"I will dare anything rather than fall into Lupton's hands away from here," was his reply.

"So be it—what *you* dare, *I* dare; but it is not wise; it is running more risks than needs."

"Laurence is a good fellow; I was never afraid of Laurence from a boy. I wish we had never seen that girl—he has behaved better to me than any of you; and I know he loves poor Mortimer."

At these words a spasm of anguish disturbed Lady Georgiana's frozen face, and turning to John, she said,—

“Who will tell him? *I cannot.*”

It was a scene of sickening weakness, wickedness, wretchedness. John Withers looked quite ill and worn out when he went home after it, and this was by no means the last act in the pitiful tragedy. What he said to them in his character of priest need not be quoted here; but in his position as kinsman he was kind. Mortimer did not appear so long as he waited; and Mistress Dobie on being inquired of, said she had watched him go over the fell before the rector arrived. He left without seeing him, therefore, and for all that the revelation *must* come, John fancied Lady Georgiana was thankful even for this brief reprieve.

It was a very sad evening at the rectory. Letters were written to Sir Laurence at the Hague, where he was almost sure to go sooner or later, though his exact whereabouts was not known; and in John's was enclosed a copy of Mr. Gilsland's confession. Katherine was exceedingly anxious that Oliver should be moved down to the rectory before Sir Laurence came home; let him have been ever so weak, ever so wicked, he was still a brother, and a brother to all appearance, hanging now on the verge of the grave. John did not gainsay her wishes, and as Arthur Hill and Grace seconded them, it was determined that the

proposal of a refuge there should be made to Lady Georgiana. It was impossible that Oliver could travel far in his present condition, and it was equally impossible that he could remain where he was. He could not be left under the roof of his injured brother through the crisis that was now drawing nearer every day.

V.

The family at the rectory were all seated at breakfast the next morning when Mortimer Warleigh was seen to come in at the gate, sauntering and slow as his manner was. Having closed it he stood leaning upon it and looking back up the road by the way he had come for several minutes ; then turned along the path to the side door. John left the table to go to him, and for the next ten minutes after the library door was heard to close upon them, the rest of the party sat almost without a word, hushed and anxious waiting for the issue. At the end of that time the two reappeared in the garden, John without his hat, holding the young man's arm and speaking to him with grave earnestness. Grace watched them through the window, her mild eyes brimming with tears, and Katherine covered her face to hide hers.

"It will fall very cruelly upon him," remarked Arthur Hill; and the young folks stared and marvelled and held their peace, impressed most deeply as the young always are by the sense of a surrounding atmosphere of trouble when they do not understand whence it arises. At length the two in the garden parted; Mortimer went off at his leisurely pace, and John returned sadly to the breakfast-room.

"How does the poor fellow bear it?" said Arthur Hill as his brother-in-law reappeared; the women with their eyes mutely asking the same.

"It is hard to judge. He says nothing—he seems stunned," was the answer. "Mortimer has a high mind—it is the fraud, the hideous disgrace that touch him; not the loss of money or of position." Katherine asked if her husband had had to tell him the story or only to confirm it. "Only to confirm it," he replied. "Lady Georgiana spoke to him last night, and Lupton added her testimony. That woman has not left the Hurtlemere House yet."

"Did you tell Mortimer that we wish him to come down here with his father and mother, John? If not I shall go up myself," said Katherine. John remonstrated faintly, but his wife repeated her determination. "Yes—Grace and I will walk up after

prayers. We shall put them all somewhere. The boys may sleep at the Force Farm till they go back to school; Mary Wray will take care of them; and when Rachel goes to Prior's Bank her room will be at liberty." It sounded strange, these trivial domestic arrangements coming athwart such serious events—but it is always thus in common life.

And about midway the morning Katherine and Grace did go up to the Hurltemere House, and settled everything to their satisfaction. Oliver Warleigh acceded to their proposal eagerly, whispering to Katherine that she must not offer to take in his nurse, as he could do perfectly well without her; he did not seem to be suffering much in any way that day; whether he felt that the worst was over, and was rallying against it, or whether he was growing too weak to be any longer shaken by pangs of human fear, was not easy to tell. He looked like a man who has finished a tremendous task or put off a heavy burden, and was now preparing to enjoy rest. After the long and terrible disquietudes he had borne, his present position must have been one of comparative ease and comfort. Natures of his base sort suffer more from the dread of discovery and the penalties of guilt than from the inward conscience.

It was not thus with Lady Georgiana. She sat like a statue, defying fate, not conquered by it. She had told all to her favourite son, and he had not reproached her. He had made no complaint; he had not uttered one harsh or unkindly word; he had not given her one cold or angry look, and yet she knew he was lost to her love for ever. If this cruel woman cherished anything it was Mortimer—the only plea she had for her crime was that she did it to advance him; and if he abandoned her in her disgrace, she would suffer with tenfold bitterness the anguish of bereavement that she had callously inflicted on poor little Gipsy and her father a dozen years before.

The facts could not be long in getting abroad now; as soon as the rectory received its unhappy guests, Mistress Dobie would have leisure to carry her gossip to market. There were a thousand revelations in her wrinkled sagacious visage that morning, but no one invited her to talk. She only delivered herself of one remarkable criticism on the obnoxious nurse whose reign she perceived was over. “There is, ma’am,” said she, addressing Katherine, “brass enough in that woman’s face to make a warming-pan;” and she appeared to derive an exquisite additional satisfaction from the utterance of it, when

she became aware that Mrs. Lupton was behind her and had overheard it.

Two days after this Rachel Withers prepared to move to Prior's Bank. She had seen Sinclair Ferrand, who had begged her to be there when his aunts and Alice arrived with the doctor. She was nothing loth, though it was something of a trial too, to enter as guest those familiar rooms that had so long been home. Before she left the rectory, John agreed with her that he would come to Prior's Bank the next day, and lay before the doctor and his son all the discoveries that had been made affecting Alice, and after that they might judge how far the intelligence need go before Sir Laurence arrived at the Hurtlemere House. Everybody in the secret now thought it would be best and safest to withhold it from her until her father was present to reclaim her.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

ALICE IN HURTLEDALE.

Old faces glimmer'd thro' the doors,
Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
Old voices called her from without.—TENNYSON.

I.

THE travellers arrived at Prior's Bank about six o'clock, all much tired, and not entirely exempt from those little infirmities of temper which a long journey through a sultry summer's day is apt to stir up. But Sinclair soon smoothed the ruffled plumes of the elder ladies, and Alice's wanted no smoothing; for she was as bright as a humming-bird, and beautifully, frankly happy at seeing him again. As for the doctor, the height of his disturbance never reached beyond the comfort of a classical quotation, and when the party sat down to dinner all the cares of the world might have been banished a hundred miles off for any appearance they made at the board.

Miss Delia had quite recovered from her disinclination to the journey. "It is very pleasant dining with Sinclair in his own house after all, and this is excellent lamb, my dear," said she, nodding her cap towards her nephew with great benignity. "And how are you getting on, Sunshine? remember you ate nothing at luncheon. It is many, many years since pleasure and excitement took away *my* appetite—a little more mint sauce, if you please; thank you. Yes, take care of her, Sinclair; I give her into *your* charge here. As I tell her, it is impossible to live without eating."

Alice blushed and laughed at her aunt Delia's prosaic remarks, and then Miss Flora had her little unconscious revelation to make of how Sunshine had been in the clouds for a week, and, in consequence, the very worst of company to them at Brookfall. Rachel Withers suggested that she had perhaps been scribbling another fairy fantasia, but Sinclair looking at her merrily, read "No" in her clear candid eyes. Say that she had been in dreamland, sheenland, loveland, dreaming of him, who will assert but that she had her right to dream?

There was light enough when dinner was over, to go out into the garden, and even to see the beauty of the surrounding country in the maize-coloured and

purple tints of twilight and moonlight mellow and mingled. The lawn had been newly mown in the morning, and was as smooth and even as the turf of the Claymire downs; so there stayed the doctor, smoking his after-dinner cigar, and there stayed the aunts with Rachel, though chary of possible dews attending the nightfall. By the river under the ash-trees they could see now and then the figures of Sinclair and Alice passing to and fro. Miss Delia remarked once that they did not seem to have much to say to each other, but perhaps the silence of happy lovers is as sociable. *Her* fluency, however, fatigue had by no means diminished. She had a hundred and fifty things to talk of, each one more trivial than the other; but in her moods of excitement the excellent old lady, like many virtuous persons of her sex, always prattled fastest. Rachel was her patient listener.

First she reviewed the daily life at Claymire since Rachel left it; enlarging on the delinquencies of a scapegrace little scholar in her class at the school, and devoutly hoping that no greater harm than ordinary would befall him in her absence. Then she expatiated on the propriety and expedience of Mr. Clarke, the curate, seeking him a wife to replace his sister in the parish; for she was going to marry.

“A sensible, staid, active woman, something like yourself he should choose, Rachel,” she was pleased to say; to which Rachel replied that he would show very little judgment if he selected a wife of *her* years when there were nice girls to be had for the asking. Next a remark Miss Flora made on the excellence of the peas she had eaten at dinner, sent her sister off on the subject of marrowfats, and of kitchen-garden produce in general; thence to the kitchen-garden of Prior’s Bank in particular; its aspect, its situation, its productiveness, and its liability to visitations from frogs and toads by reason of its proximity to the river. The allusion to amphibious vermin abbreviated the walk. Miss Delia observed that this was the time of night for them to come out, therefore *she* should go in; and as she was not disposed for solitude it became necessary that Miss Flora and Rachel Withers should go in too.

Trivial talk is supposed to be very wearisome when the mind is heavy with serious thoughts, but it rather relieved Rachel to witness the old lady’s buoyant mood, and to listen to her cheerful prattle. Lulls and levels are good for all of us in the intervals between exciting events. It would kill us to be always at high pressure of excitement whether of

joy or sorrow; and during the last few weeks, Rachel had been terribly strung up. She wisely let herself go now, and rested on Miss Delia's chat as on a wholesome mental and moral relaxation; and it was decidedly refreshing in its effects.

"I begin to think we shall enjoy our visit here very much, sister Flo'," recommenced the old lady, appropriating to herself with a sigh of exceeding comfort what had been Mrs. Sara Grandage's favourite easy chair. "It is nice to see where our dear child is to make her home; the only drawback is that it is so far away from Brookfall. But they will visit us every year—only to think of it! Sinclair looks very proud and happy—cunning fellow, imagine, Rachel, that he has had his eye on Sunshine ever since he grew up! He never had a suspicion of Mr. More—I do not dare to fancy what he might have done had he found out while it was going on! And I need not have worried myself about that beautiful young Warleigh—it seems she only mixt him up in some wonderful way with her vagaries about her childhood before she came to us. I was really afraid at one time she was going to be fond of him, and he would never have suited *us*. I object to weak men; if a woman cannot rest in implicit reliance on her husband, my feeling is

that she would be better without one. Now, I consider Sinclair a very fine character—plenty of moral bone and muscle about him; but in Mortimer Warleigh it had all run to sentiment.”

“Did you perceive a shade of anxiety in Sinclair’s countenance, when he first met us, Delia dear?” asked Miss Flora at the earliest pause in her sister’s rivulet of talk. “It soon disappeared when he looked at Sunshine, but I almost began to fear there might be something amiss.”

No, Miss Delia had observed nothing but what was perfectly delightful; she had never seen Sinclair appear to greater advantage in his life; she should have considered it a very poor compliment had he looked glum when he was welcoming them to his house for the first time, especially when his father was there and dear Alice; how could sister Flo’ fancy such a thing?

It was not difficult to understand how sister Flo’ had fancied it. Sinclair had been looking very grave and thoughtful—even oppressed—for the last few days. With Alice’s vagaries, as he had considered them, strong in his mind, he had heard one or two of the wild stories then circulating about the dales concerning the Oliver Warleighs and Sir Laurence’s lost daughter; and adding them together

with the almost inevitable interpretation, he began to see changes awaiting his Sunshine, and shoals of kinsfolk ready to claim her. He was very well contented with things as they were; he did not desire a division and sub-division of her affections; he would have preferred to keep them all to himself. Perhaps a little cloud of doubt and uncertainty beset his own prospects in the anticipation of what was coming, but Alice's radiant face effectually dispersed it, and when he sat by her at dinner there was not a shadow remaining. Before a real and present love like hers all manner of anxieties fell effaced. Let come what might of external changes her faithful heart for him would never change!

When the doctor's cigar was smoked out, he stepped through the glass-door and joined his sisters, and soon after came in the two young ones; she with a damask rose in her hair, and a soft, happy light shining in her eyes. She did not look like lost Gipsy now. The berry-brown skin of that sunburnt darling was no longer hers; but a warm, creamy tint, into which melted a pure, healthy blush on either rounded cheek. Her movements had acquired a new, unconscious grace; she was always an affectionate, caressing creature, but hitherto she had certainly worn her mad cap rather airily; for the

present, however, she seemed to have laid it aside, and taken to wearing in its stead the coif of maidenly dignity; and the one suited her even more charmingly than the other.

She sang several of the doctor's favourite songs in her sweet flute-like voice, and Sinclair stood by looking and listening in a trance of delight. His aunt Delia addressed him thrice in vain, and indemnified herself for his uncivil absence of mind by remarking audibly, "He is in the clouds now, I suppose; it is a merciful provision of Providence that we are not all there together."

Alice overheard her through the symphony of one of her ballads, and glancing round with a rosy smile, whispered, "Sinclair, auntie Dee is speaking to you;" when the absent lover came back to himself and said, It was divine! but what was divine, whether the song, or his own reverie, or Miss Delia's voice, did not clearly appear.

After dark it came on to rain, softly, but with an even-down pertinacity that threatened continuance. It would be a pity, Rachel Withers said, if the weather broke up now; for half the beauty of Hurtle-dale was in the sun, and it would be disappointing if Alice did not see it at its best. So it would, all agreed, but then nobody could bespeak fine weather!

II.

The first person Rachel saw on coming downstairs next morning was Alice, leaning her forehead against the window-glass and watching with disconsolate eyes the slow trickling of the rain-drops down the streaming pane. She was in the morning-room alone, and as Rachel joined her she turned round and said: "This is going to be a thorough wet day, Rachel, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Rachel, imitating her aggrieved tone, and looking out she saw that woods, river, moor, fells, were all wiped away from the landscape as by a sponge of dense grey mist. It certainly was unlucky—they could not even see the limits of the lawn; and the roses on the verandah hung their drowned heads down heavy and hopeless. It had not ceased raining for a minute throughout the night.

"Is it often like this at Prior's Bank?" Alice asked again. Rachel told her no; she thought the fog must have come on for pure perversity; for, in fact, Hurtledale was much less troubled with fogs than was Claymire with sea-mist. This comforted her a little and she came away from the dispiriting window.

"You must make acquaintance with in-doors," suggested Rachel, and at that her countenance brightened altogether.

"It is really prettier than Brookfall, Rachel, though I would not grieve auntie Dee by allowing her to suppose I thought so," said she, with natural cheerfulness. "Sinclair tells me he has made no material alterations—do you see any changes?"

"No—he has left them for your taste to direct." Rachel preferred to talk of the future rather than of the past just now; she did not like to think of kind old Bittersweet when this young generation was taking possession of her abdicated house.

They had not been many minutes alone when Sinclair looked in at the door, and holding out his hand to Alice bade them come to breakfast; the aunts and doctor were already there. It is an old-fashioned custom, that of offering the hand to conduct a lady, but there is more of grace and courtesy in it than in offering the arm, or the elbow, as some men do. And the pretty way in which Alice gave him hers! If the ghost of Bittersweet, who held to all ancient politenesses, could have seen her at that moment, it would have smiled on her benignant for the admiration its original had of simple, easy, modest manners!

The weather did not clear. They watched it

through breakfast, and they watched it after breakfast, but still down came the rain with a vicious, steady, unwearying persistence. The doctor betook himself to the library, and the ladies retired to the morning-room, where some of them worked and some of them made believe to work, while Sinclair read aloud to them that famous dissertation of Elia's on roast-pig, which is more delicious than the tenderest suckling that ever made its last public appearance sheathed in crisp brown armour of crackling. But on that point, of course, opinions might differ. Miss Delia, though no epicure, confessed to a weakness for the real thing, even while mentioning that it always suggested to her *baked baby*—and witness the singular connexion of ideas! Charles Lamb never meant that exquisite humorous chapter to transport its readers to the remote Fiji Islands, but it did so, and left them stranded there, bemoaning the evil practices of the cannibals until only Miss Delia and Rachel were left to bemoan. Miss Delia petted the unsavoury subject, and dived into deep speculations on what doleful stories the first missionaries who went thither to reform the taste of the inhabitants might have told if they would; until they heard from the adjoining room a swift chromatic scale followed up by a spirited waltz. This sufficiently betrayed the

whereabouts of Sunshine and Sinclair, and Miss Flora having mentioned something about a letter to cook at home had no doubt retired to write it beyond the scent of the Fiji ovens.

Rachel rendered herself up an unwilling sacrifice for an hour or more, longing and yet trembling for her brother John's arrival. He came about eleven o'clock, and having inquired first for her, was introduced into the room where she sat with Miss Delia alone. He handed her a letter, and then gave her the opportunity of reading it undisturbed by taking the old lady to talk to meanwhile. It was from Sir Laurence Warleigh, written at Leyden, whence he was going to the Hague two days later; and at the Hague, he said, letters would find him till the month's end. By this date, therefore, he had probably received the copy of Mr. Gilsland's confession and the letters that accompanied it; and if so, he might be in Hurtleddale on the day after the morrow.

Rachel sat quiet for a minute or two after she had read it, listening to the waltz-music that flowed from Alice's deft and rapid fingers, and thinking what extremes meet in this strange world of ours, until John intimated to her that he wished to pay his respects to Doctor Ferrand on his arrival in the

dale—Sinclair he had seen once already. Miss Delia parted with her new acquaintance cordially, and Rachel herself was bidden to usher him into the library, where the doctor was supposed to be. The room was empty, however, when they entered it, so she rang the bell, and asked the servant who answered it to seek both the gentlemen; then sat down with her brother, and endured a few very agitated moments in contemplation of the interview that was about to take place.

Rachel Withers always connected the telling of Annis's story afterwards with the scent of white moss roses; for the library was fragrant with them, newly gathered the day before. She would fain have left John to get through it by himself, but this he would not permit; for he rightly conjectured that there would be a hundred slight details asked for that only she could give. The glass-door was shut, but it looked out on a pretty shady nook of the garden with beech-trees encircling it and a basket of scarlet geraniums in the centre of the grass-plot. She made conversation about those geraniums with a view of steadying her nerves; but the faster she talked the more excited she grew, and soon she reached that point when she did not know what she was saying. How she envied people who were always masters of

their parts of speech ! John was strung up too ; the irrelevance of his replies to her prattle betrayed it. He did not like his task, which yet must be done ; and by-and-by they dropt into silence—the silence of waiting and expectancy, than which there are few states of being more thoroughly trying and uncomfortable.

The doctor had had courage to turn out in the rain, and a fine gleam having made itself apparent just at the moment when Rachel and her brother passed from the morning room to the library, Alice and Sinclair had taken immediate advantage of it to sally forth too ; but the servant sent in quest of them found them all in the garden, and in about ten minutes the doctor came in by the glass door with his son close behind him. John Withers was introduced to his father by Sinclair, and after a few every-day expressions of courtesy the group subsided into chairs, all but Rachel, who continued standing and looking very helpless.

“ I hope there is nothing amiss, my dear ? ” said the cordial old doctor ; “ pray sit down—you are as white as a ghost.”

It would have relieved her inexpressibly had she possessed the vanishing powers of one !

Sinclair perceived that something very serious was

in the wind, and took his seat in silence at the farther side of the library table, upon which he leant his arms, drawing towards him the perfumy bowl of white roses, over which he bent his face while watching Rachel with shrewd scrutiny. He had a good guess what was coming.

She could never afterwards recal the exact terms with which John approached his subject, but she knew there was confusion and iteration in his beginning, and that after a few seconds of patient listening the doctor crossed his legs, leant back in his chair and took a pinch of snuff, while Sinclair pushed away the roses and woke up into keen and vivid interest. And at last it was all out. She heard John say, with that peculiar muffled indistinctness that clothes the sounds heard between sleeping and waking, "It is beyond a doubt that Alice is Sir Laurence Warleigh's daughter, Dr. Ferrand. We have every proof of it. His brother and his brother's wife admit the fact, and we have besides the written confession of Mr. Gilsland, from whom your most excellent sisters received her, and who was one of the chief agents in her abduction."

Then Rachel seemed to be suddenly roused to a clear comprehension of all that was passing, and Sinclair, upon whom *certainty* came with a shock,

notwithstanding all his previsions, sprang up impetuous, exclaiming: "And Sunshine's *delusions* are *truths*? It was no idle caprice that turned her with such fear and loathing from Lady Georgiana Warleigh and attracted her with such a tantalizing curiosity towards Mortimer."

"Let us hear the particulars, Sinclair," interposed the doctor, cutting short his energetic speech; "and close that window—we left her about the garden somewhere, and she had better not come in here just now."

The window was shut, and that commonplace measure of precaution seemed to sober the whole party down into self-possession. John drew an audibly long breath, and Rachel tried to clear her head by pushing the hair away from her brow with tremulous cold hands. The doctor bade her not get excited if she could help it.

"I have always suspected that Gilsland knew more about the child than he chose to tell," said he, "but this revelation certainly comes upon me as a surprise. Let us see the confession—let us have it read out. Eh, Sinclair, my boy, this makes a new chapter in your romance—I wish it may have a good ending."

"It can make no difference between Alice and me,

sir," replied the young man, calmly drawing back the white roses.

Then John Withers having produced the document, the doctor read it without interruption, his comment at the conclusion being,

"That is as complete and foul a bit of villany as ever came within the scope of my knowledge."

"What my darling must have suffered!" muttered Sinclair passionately, his face kindling with indignation.

"And the principal actors in the crime are not publicly unmasked yet?" said the doctor.

"There are many innocent persons to be considered," replied John. "We wait for Sir Laurence—even to him the recovery of his daughter cannot be all joy, seeing it will reveal the long-continued treachery of his brother."

Sinclair now moved towards the glass door, but his father stretched out a hasty hand to arrest him; had he not been withheld, he would have sought Alice there and then to comfort her for all sorrows past and gone with the good news.

"Wait awhile—let us consider the ways and means, my boy," said the kind old doctor. "There are your aunts to be thought of—Alice's great gain will look at first sight to them a great loss, I sadly fear."

Thus admonished, Sinclair put a restraint upon himself; but though he did not follow the promptings of his tender impatience, he watched the garden closely that he might see the light of his eyes if she chanced to flit round that way, and so full was he of his thoughts of her sweet self, that he did not hear one half of the details now given to the doctor by John Withers and Rachel. Perhaps the main feeling in his heart was that, let her be whose child she might, she was his own dear love and troth-plighted darling beyond the power of all the fathers in Christendom to divide them.

The result of further debate was that Alice should not be told the truth until Sir Laurence arrived in Hurtledale, and that the good old aunts should be spared the pains of expectation too—there could not be long to wait for the end now. Just when they had arrived at this conclusion, the servant announced luncheon, and they all passed into the dining-room together; talking as airily as they could of the things of every day; the doctor with full success, but Rachel with a conspicuous absence of even common-sense. The other two were midway between the extremes.

The sky had brightened at noon and given some hope of a fine after part to the day; but the hope in

an hour or so proved fallacious; the clouds came over again thicker and blacker than ever, and the pelting rain lashed violently against the windows, causing the doctor to remark that he did not envy John his walk home to the rectory.

“I must ask you to give me shelter until my wife and sister-in-law come down in the carriage this afternoon to pay you a visit of neighbourly courtesy—then they will carry me back dry,” said John, appealing to Miss Flora and Miss Delia, who bowed, smiled and looked pleased at the very prompt civility of Hurtledale—not that it was always so prompt by any means.

In readiness for the anticipated call, the two old ladies betook themselves to the drawing-room afterwards, and there sat in state with their prettiest pieces of company-work displayed. Alice also was exhorted to employ herself becomingly, and this she did with a volume of Bon Gaultier’s Ballads; edifying their serenities every now and then with some grotesque parody of serious sentiment that especially tickled her sense of fun. Miss Delia Ferrand did not think her cousin Sara’s stand of favourite books in a corner of this room, which Sinclair had left precisely as it was, at all well selected for a Christian gentlewoman; for the library she was not respon-

sible—that was the collection of generations; but for her pet volumes—let anybody look at them! Not a *good* book amongst them!

They had to play a rather tedious game of patience before Katherine and Grace appeared, but about half-past four a carriage was heard driving round to the door, and a minute afterwards they presented themselves, splendid in garb and card-case in hand, as if this were a mere formal ceremony like any other first visit to new settlers in the dale. What born actresses most women are! Rachel knew by herself what Kate must be feeling, and she watched her anxiously, but could not for the life of her detect that her countenance changed by a single shade when Alice was introduced to her. The sisters had expected John's report of their new niece before encountering the ordeal of a meeting, but his remaining at Prior's Bank had left them without that help; nevertheless, they looked her full in the face, and inclined their heads with smiling pleasantness; and then they sat and talked of the weather, of this, of that, of the other, of every insipidity that enters into the dull conversational mosaic of a morning call, with admirable ease and self-possession. They were for the first five minutes, six women together, but presently in came Sinclair, and after him John and the

doctor, and then the chat ran, if not more fluently, at all events, more variously. Katherine then took an opportunity of drawing near to Alice, but even then the shrewdest observer would not have detected any special interest in her air or tone. Even John looked at her astonished and perplexed.

Sunshine was her perfect self. Her manner was very quiet and composed on ordinary occasions, and this seemed to her no more. Mrs. Withers and Mrs. Hill were two quite indifferent names to her ears—had they been announced as Katherine and Grace Warleigh there would have been a show of far greater interest. Strangers did not flurry or abash her; she thought too little of herself to be shy, therefore Katherine saw her and read her for what she was. Miss Delia had taken possession of Grace, whose blue mild eyes would now and then wander to where Alice and her sister sat, and then her mind wandered too from the old lady's tedious ditty of her journey, to poor little, long-lost Gipsy, sitting there in the midst of them, so fair and maidenly, and utterly unconscious of the interest circling closer and closer around her.

The visit passed off without incident, and the very brief opportunity Rachel had of a private word with her sister-in-law, she of course availed herself of to

ask how she liked Alice. Katherine gave her a rueful look and a quite womanish answer. "If she were a seraph I could not be glad to acknowledge her Laurence's child yet—oh! there's a world of trouble to come! But she is beautiful, lovely; I quite exonerate you from any charge of dulness in not recognizing her before; I could look at her for a month without finding in her any trace of resemblance to Annis. Gipsy was almost as dark and rough as a real gipsy. It will be rather hard on Laurence to offer him this fair, dainty, princess-like damsel for a daughter in lieu of his little passionate, unkempt wildling. If she be like any of the family it is Lady Foulis—she is quite as tall and has her air. She is not in the least what I pictured her to myself. Her lover will be a man after Laurence's own heart from the look of him—I wish for all our sakes Mortimer stood in his shoes!"

"Quite, quite vain to wish *that*," responded Rachel; and then they parted, and the carriage drove away, and Sunshine summoned Rachel to hear the conclusion of a merry ballad which their arrival had interrupted.

On their homeward road, John gave his wife and Grace an account of his critical interview with the doctor and his son; and explained how Alice and

the aunts were to be kept in ignorance of it until Sir Laurence came back from abroad, and was on the spot to reclaim his child without any long agony of waiting and suspense.

"I saw she did not know the moment I saw her—we were speculating all the way to Prior's Bank whether you would have told her or not," said Grace.

"Of course I left that for her present guardians to decide," replied John. "What good people they are, and how good they have been to her! I fancied once or twice I detected in her bits of Gipsy as she used to be."

"Did you—I did not," said his wife. "I was afraid Laurence would never know her again. Perhaps he may."

"I hope so—how will he feel it, I wonder? I wish Bond could intercept him in London, and travel down with him. I cannot imagine to myself what will be his mode of action at all—how he will deal with Oliver and the rest."

Neither could Katherine nor Grace, though they might be supposed to know their brother best. When Sir Laurence returned from America the year after his child's reputed death, he went out into the churchyard with Katherine, and read the

inscription on the memorial stone which had replaced the cedar he had planted on Helena's grave; and after speaking a little of Annis's affectionate ways and great fondness for himself, he said he ought never to have let her leave him. And from that day to this no one had ever heard him mention the names of either wife or child again.

III.

The following day rose fine after the heavy rain, and all the landscape showed exquisitely fresh, bright, and beautiful. Alice walked into the garden before breakfast with the doctor to and fro the wild-flower bank, and came in looking like a rose of May, as Miss Delia poetically expressed it. The old lady had quite come out in the way of compliments since she arrived in the north, and had a pleasant word for everybody.

Immediately after prayers were over, Sunshine donned her hat for a ramble on the moors—nothing less would content her; so Sinclair acquiesced and proposed a round by which the old Hurtlemere House would be avoided.

“We will go over the fell towards Mirkdale and show her our grandest view, and home by the Force

and the high beck," said he. "You will come with us, Miss Withers, and you, sir?" to his father; "but the distance would be too great for my aunts." They agreed that it would, and preferred besides a quiet morning indoors; therefore they were left to keep each other company, and the rest set forth in search of the picturesque.

There was a delicious breeze blowing on the fell, quite as sweet as if sharper than the air on the Claymire downs; but here all was more rugged; stronger in colour, in form, and in whatever constitutes the distinctive character of scenery. They went high up on the hill, and then turned off by a path through the heather towards a cairn that marked the topmost point of Hurtlefell, whence they could see outspread below them all the glowing panorama of Mirkdale. In all the range of the world there can be no more truly satisfying prospect to heart and eye than one of our English valleys when the time is tending towards harvest; when the meadows, lately mown, lie green as emerald along the marge of the rivers, and the sloping cornlands further up are changing to gold and burnished brown in the fervent August sun. Standing by the cairn with the waves of heather around them, and big grey rocky boulders rising out of the purple sea,

in the midst of the silence of the hills—which is a silence such as there is none other—they cried one and all that not any part of their holiday-tour had shown them a lovelier, happier scene than this unsung valley at home!

After her first impulsive words of delight, Alice was peculiarly quiet in her admiration and enjoyment of it; she thoroughly appreciated and felt the charm of fine scenery; but she never worked off her sentiment in the exclamatory fashion. Those who did not know her might think her apathetic; but those who did, one glance at the glow and expression of her face was enough to convince of her enthusiasm. She would sit silent for an hour sometimes, brooding over the features of a beautiful landscape; and to her, as to all the true lovers of nature, the familiarity of a place only enhanced its attraction; often as she had wandered round about Claymire, neither sea, nor downs, nor shore, nor green luxuriant glen, looked to her eyes ever twice the same.

They sat down at the foot of the cairn for a long time, and Rachel acted as guide to point out the special objects of interest in the dale below. Pen-slaven Castle stood out on the horizon with more than common distinctness, and Whinstane Tower showed itself faintly against a dusk background of

wood to those who knew just where to look for it—only to herself, that is. Sinclair betrayed no interest in these places that Rachel could perceive; he was almost as silent as Alice, though probably less absorbed in admiring contemplation. Perhaps he was meditating on the new interest that was coming into her life—perhaps he was even doubting whether or not it might interfere with his own claims. His character was generous; he would rather have her with no other dower but her beauty and her sunshine, than dowered with all these rich possessions which must eventually become hers. He loved her for herself, and felt as if she belonged to him of right more than to any other; and, her promise given, she did.

When they had gazed their fill from this point of the moors, they proceeded for nearly two miles in a direct line on the high level until they reached the Force, and here occurred the event of the day. When Sinclair Ferrand had settled their route so very carefully to exclude the Hurtlemere House, it had struck Rachel, though she said nothing, that if Mary Wray happened to be about the farm-yard, feeding her poultry, pigs, or other dependants, they should in fact run greater risk from *her* than from the bleak grey outside walls of Gipsy's old home; and so it really turned out. Dicky and Andrew were sleep-

ing at the farm now, to leave room at the rectory for the Oliver Warleights; and it appeared that they found enough amusement about the place to like breakfasting there as well; for they were presiding over the manœuvres of a sturdy, shaggy colt which the rough rider was breaking-in when Sinclair opened the gate for the party to pass through the farm-yard after leaving the Force. The two boys were perched on the half-door of the barn, looking on in glee and security; and it would hardly have been like Dicky had he not hailed his new friend Sinclair Ferrand to stop and witness the fun.

Whether there was any vein of recollection in Alice's mind connected with the place, Rachel could not tell, but she gazed wistfully about her, and then sat down on the mounting steps against the house-wall close by the back-door, apparently as well-pleased to see the tough, self-willed little colt broken-in as the boys themselves. Rachel, on the contrary, did not like the struggles and kickings and crackings of the whip inevitable to the disciplinary process, and therefore she went round into Mary Wray's pretty span of a garden in front of the house, which was always in summer a perfect nest of flowers.

She had not been there more than five minutes enjoying the brightness and fragrance of some old-

fashioned red and purple double stocks when Mary Wray, with a face as white as the apron with which she was hurriedly wiping the suds of the washtub from her stout arms, looked out of the house, and vehemently beckoned Rachel to go to her. Rachel guessed what had come to pass. Mary drew her into the best parlour, fragrant of roses and sweet-briar which filled a china bowl on the table, and having shut to the door, faced her almost fiercely, saying in a low voice, but a voice full of conviction,

“Miss Rachel, who’s yon i’ the broad brown hat sitting o’ the steps i’ the yard? She’s ta’en her hat off to make hersen a fan of it, and there sits Sir Laurence Warleigh’s ain bairn as sure as I am a living woman! If I rive that coffin out o’ th’ ground wi’ my ain hands it sal be done! There was nare a speck or a spot upo’ all her fair body where th’ sun had na’ touched it, but token or no token, *I* knaw her as I nursed at my breast when the Lord he took my ain babe, an’ all the dale sal knaw her too or ever I be a day aulder. You’ll tell me, Miss Rachel, is yon Miss Annis come back?”

Evasion would have been here equally unfeeling and unwise; Rachel therefore said that it was Annis and no other, on which Mary burst into a passion of tears, dropped into a chair, and flung her apron over

her head to cry unseen, rocking herself to and fro and sobbing at intervals : " My puir lost bairn, my ain lost bairn ! " until it made Rachel almost weep for sympathy to see her. When at last she uncovered her face, her first question was, did Sir Laurence know ? Rachel told her that by that time he did, and was now no doubt hastening home to reclaim his child. She then gave her to understand that she would distress and injure many did she publish her discovery before his arrival, and promised if she would come down to Prior's Bank in the afternoon and inquire for her, she would tell her the whole tragical history. Mary promised, and Rachel then made her escape, dreading every moment lest the boys should come round into the house and surprise her in her unwonted agitation. It seemed singular that Mary should recognize in an instant the likeness of poor Gipsy in Alice when Katherine and Grace could detect no trace of her, and Rachel hardly. Perhaps her relation to the child as foster-mother quickened her natural instinct ; and it was an augury that Sir Laurence himself might not find a perfect stranger in his daughter.

About four o'clock of the afternoon Mary Wray came down to Prior's Bank in a state of eager, affectionate excitement and longing to see her nursling

again. She had dressed herself in her Sunday best and put on her most formal face to pass through the scrutiny of the servants' hall, but when she was safe in the privacy of Rachel's room, with the door locked to prevent interruptions, she broke out weeping for joy, and it was some time before she was calm enough to listen to the tale she was trembling with anxiety to hear. But when Rachel began she listened breathlessly, every now and then venting her indignation, pity or surprise in low-voiced, intense ejaculations.

"Didn't I allus tell folks she hadn't fair play!" she said appealingly, when Rachel had made an end of the first part of her story. "That Lady Georgiana is a bad lot, an' I care na who hears me say it! For that matter I ha' said it oft enew afore this for all t' world to know."

She then allowed Rachel to proceed, and when she heard how poor Gipsy had been found in the storm on the down by Sinclair Ferrand and taken in at Brookfall, her tears burst out again and she cried, "Oh! but there was angels on earth yet an' suldn't she like to kiss that young tyke who was so good to her bairn!" Rachel told her she had seen him in the farm-yard with her that morning, to which she replied, "I took no heed to him—none. My eyes was fastened on her that I couldna' get 'em

awa'. It didn't come upon me wi'out a sort o' warning, though it came sudden. Mistress Dobie, an' Lucy Robb, an' me, we've oft got talking about her lately, an' Mistress Dobie allus persisted i' saying how strange it was as them White Hands hadn't blessed th' innicent bairn if she was to be ta'en awa'; an' ane night Matthew, he'd been reading in a book o' t' master's how a bairn that had been hidden fra his family's gret enemy an' counted for dead years an' years i' them long ago times o' civil war, turned up again when peace came an' was ca'ed ever after t' Shepherd Lord. An' Lucy Robb says, for she fond o' a romance is Lucy, 'What if our Miss Annis had been put out o' t' road like yon?' an' Matthew too, he said as there had been more unlikely things heerd tell on, not a hunder miles fra Hurtleddale. An' that set us reckoning he guessed somewhat, but we could nane on us get him to speak plain out. We didn't forget his words tho', and sin' there's been such strange goings on at t' auld Hurtleddale House wi' yon Dr. Frith, an' nurse Lupton, as was regular tyrants over Master Oliver an' Lady Georgiana, Mistress Dobie has got an inkling o' many queer things."

When Rachel had quite finished her narrative Mary gave audible thanks to God that the wicked were discomfited, and then begged that she might be

brought to a sight of her darling if it were only for a single instant. "Let me ha' ane glint o' her bonny face afore I go, Miss Rachel," she pleaded with tears in her eyes and voice. "I'll not speak a word, an' when I get home I'll shut myself up out o' folk's way lest I suld be tempted to prate o' my gret joy."

Rachel had not the heart to say her nay and yet her request was not easy to grant. In the first place she did not know Sunshine's whereabouts, and in the second she feared that as Mary had recognized her at a glance so also might she recognize Mary; and though the end could not be far off now, yet it would be safest to keep her in peace until the happiness of regaining her father could be at once perfected by his presence. However, as Mary was in no haste to return home, Rachel kept her there in her room until the dressing-bell rang, and a minute or two after came Alice's light step past her door. She then bade Mary place herself away from the window and as much in the shade as she could, promising to call Gipsy in as she went by again on her way downstairs; and this she did, making a pretence that she wanted one of her bracelets linking.

Alice entered, without observing Mary's retired figure, clad all in white, with a cluster of scarlet geraniums and some light drooping ferns in her hair.

Her dress, high to the throat and long to the wrists, yet defined a perfectly graceful, girlish form, and her face had the lustre and freshness of youth and beauty at their best and their brightest.

The bracelet fastened, Rachel said thanks to dismiss her; but instead of going she stood still, and looked straight into the glass in front of which they were both standing; not at herself, as Rachel saw with dismay, but at the tearful, excited face of Mary which it reflected in the background. After the pause of a moment, she withdrew her gaze from the mirror to direct it full on Mary herself with the same perplexed, thoughtful expression as she always wore when some sensitive chord in her memory was struck. The situation was critical, but poor Mary behaved well; she got up, curtsied, and sidled out by the door that was behind her, saying, "it was time for her to be going and right glad she was to see Miss Rachel so nicely," in a simple, natural way such as could hardly have been looked for in a moment so trying to her faithful affection. Rachel expected Alice would pass some remark on her when she was gone, and so she did.

"What a good, kind face that woman has, Rachel—I felt a longing to kiss her," she began. "I caught her in the glass looking at me as if she loved me

too. This has been such a strange day—I know something is in the air, something is going to happen to me. But that I have promised Sinclair not to fret or be unhappy until he can discover and tell me all about papa and where I lived when I was little, I should have asked her if she knew me; for my heart whispers me that I know *her*. I should like Sinclair to see her; I wish she had not gone away so abruptly—will she be coming to see you again soon, Rachel?” And so she talked on, questioning, asserting, speculating, until to her companion’s great relief, the dinner bell rang and stopped her.

In the garden afterwards Sinclair joined Rachel for five minutes to inquire who it was Alice had seen in her room. She told him, and also how, Mary Wray having recognized her foster-child, she had judged it expedient to let her into the truth of the fast escaping mystery.

“Alice knew her too,” replied he. “She has been telling me that she is sure it was *Mamsie*, which was probably her pet name for nurse. I have consented to her going to see the Hurtlemere House to-morrow; she is so restless and inquisitive about it that there is no chance of peace for her until she has been. Your brother says Sir Laurence may arrive at almost any hour—do you not think

that good woman had better be there and Alice with her when he arrives?"

Rachel agreed that this proposal was excellent. Mary Wray used to stand in Gipsy's affections second only to her father, and if she had not vanished *when* she did and *as* she did the whole secret must have inevitably come out. Alice's memory had been awakened and set on the alert more than ever by this glimpse of a person whom she felt she had once known and dearly loved, and it would never slumber again until its yearnings were satisfied. She looked dreamily happy that evening, but her thoughts were often astray; and some instinct warned her that what she had so long and persistently waited and hoped for was drawing near its fulfilment.

Sinclair suggested that on the morrow the doctor should tell his aunts the true story of their darling while she was away at the Hurtlemer House; and thus the crisis would be over for all at the same hour. And to this the doctor himself readily acceded, though he anticipated in it a difficult and painful task; for the dear old ladies were as far from a suspicion of the facts now as they were on the first night when the poor forlorn little waif was adopted under their hospitable roof.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

REUNION.

There is no instinct like the heart.—BYRON.

I.

THE next morning, as was fitting on such a day of joy, the sun rose splendidly, and Rachel Withers did what she had not attempted now for many many years—that is, took a long walk before breakfast; first to the Force Farm, setting off by six o'clock, and then to the Rectory. At the farm she found Mary Wray busy butter-making, and with a penitent, deprecating air she began to say, ere Rachel had time to speak, that she had been obliged to tell her good man what she had discovered about “lile Miss Annis.”

“When he started o’ complaining last night, ‘Mary, my lass, thee’s gotten summat upo’ thy mind,’ what was a poor wife to do? Why I just made a clean breast of it, as was most comfortable. That’s the blessin’ o’ a husband, Miss Rachel; if you’ve gotten a

secret you're bound i' love an' duty to tell, an' not let it go on worriting your inside out. But he's away reaping i' th' barley this morning wi' yon crew o' Irishers, so he'll ha' no chance o' saying ought to anybody, an' you've no call to be afeard 'lest he suld be tempted."

It mattered little then if he were—all the world must know the secret soon; and Rachel only replied by explaining to Mary why she was there so early; namely, that it was desired *she* should be up at the Hurtlemere House when her foster-child arrived there, that if anything happened before Sir Laurence appeared, she might be ready to take her in hand and pacify her with talk of old times as no one else could. Mary was overjoyed at the reliance placed in her, and having further received permission to take Mistress Dobie into her confidence, she promised just to see breakfast done with, Dicky and Andrew packed off to the rectory out of the way of mischief, and the house *righted-up*, and then to start across the fields by the shortest road, to be in readiness for whatever might occur.

At the Rectory no one was downstairs but John, whom Rachel found reading his newly come-in letters; one being from Sir Laurence himself and another from Mr. Bond, who had travelled to town to meet

him. "Sir Laurence will be here this afternoon as I expected," announced her brother the moment she entered the room. "I hope you are prepared at Prior's Bank. He wishes me to arrange for *her* being at the Hurtlemere House when he arrives."

Rachel replied by telling him what Sinclair had proposed, and how she had just given Mary Wray her cue; which appeared to him very wise as a precautionary measure; but to prevent any possible disappointment to Sir Laurence he said he would carry his letter to Prior's Bank by-and-by, and then he gave it to Rachel to read while he opened Mr. Bond's

Sir Laurence was very brief—he had never been a long-winded correspondent nor a frequent one. He began by mentioning how he had found John's letter and enclosure at the Hague on the day he arrived there, with a second epistle from Katherine, giving him information that Annis was coming into Hurtle-dale with the kind and charitable women who had adopted her and brought her up. He wrote merely to send warning of his immediate return home, as he should follow his letter within a few hours. Bond, who had met him, had prevailed on him to rest a night in London, and he felt it wise to do so. He was well, but the news had shaken and excited him

terribly. Of his brother Oliver not a word; of Lady Georgiana not a word; no expression of resentment, disgust, or even surprise;—simply, “Let the child be at home when I come.” That one thought of beholding again his darling had thrust every other out of his mind.

Mr. Bond wrote more at large. He was with Sir Laurence at his hotel, and should return with him to Hurtleale on the morrow. He intimated that it would be advisable for the Oliver Warleights to remove from the old house if they had not already done so, but went on to say that Sir Laurence gave no vent to even a natural indignation against them. “In fact,” added the steward towards the close of his letter, “my dear master’s whole heart is possessed with the joy of regaining his daughter; she will take the loneliness out of his life, of having no one and nothing to come home to after his wanderings. He has travelled day and night from the Hague, and is in high health and spirits, but more excited and impatient than I have known him since he was a lad. *I am thankful to see him give in to sleeping here to-night, for rest is very needful to him; he would have made one long spell of his journey had I not been here to hinder it, and would have arrived knocked-up.*”

Thus it fortunately happened that all the arrangements were in accordance with Sir Laurence's wishes and Mr. Bond's suggestions; Alice would be *at home*, and the Oliver Warleights out of the way, secluded in safety at the rectory. Rachel did not see any of them that morning. Lady Georgiana kept herself entirely to her own rooms; and poor Mortimer had taken a staff in his hand, a knapsack on his back, and ten pounds which John had given him in his pocket, and gone off on a walking expedition into Cumberland. When he would return was not known. Was it part of his character to get away from the sight of guilt and shame? Neither Katherine nor Grace could approve of his abandonment of father and mother in their present miserable circumstances. He had not uttered a word of his sentiments to any one, nor had he in departing said "Good-by." Lady Georgiana felt his going thus most poignantly, but she acknowledged that it was no more than her deserts—if he *loathed* her it would be but *just*.

Rachel breakfasted at the rectory, rested a couple of hours with Katherine and Grace, and then walked up to the Hurtlemere House, proposing to sit quietly in the garden and read until Sinclair Ferrand and Alice appeared. Mary Wray had arrived a few minutes before her, and was standing with Mistress

Dobie in the porch engaged in high sensational talk. So enthralled were they that they did not observe Rachel until she was close upon them, and then did Mistress Dobie indeed greet her with loudly jubilant exclamations.

“She’d as good as guessed it lang syne, but wasn’t it gret news about Sir Laurence Warleigh’s bairn?” she said. “She’d gotten a bit scart o’ writing fra Mr. Bond only that morning to tell her t’ master was coming home, an’ she must mak preparation for a second person beside; an’ who did Miss Rachel think this second person was? Why, no other than lile Miss Annis who was dead an’ is alive again, an’ was lost an’ is found! An’ she hoped it was no sin to quote Scriptor to say that, for common words wouldn’t do it.”

Fain would she have stayed to talk longer, but she suddenly remembered there was “a sight o’ things wanted doing indoors,” and so she disappeared, taking Mary Wray with her to help work, and perhaps help gossip as well, while Rachel Withers remained in the porch resting on one of the quaint old stone benches which had never been removed from it since Moor Murray’s ancestors of many generations back placed them there, as Matthew Dobie, who practically understood the indulgence, averred, for the free and

pleasanter enjoyment of their evening pipes. He smoked his own in the porch of summer nights when his master was away, and had smoked himself into a full conviction that the stone benches had been put there wholly and solely to promote the ease and comfort of all sound lovers of tobacco.

Rachel had seen the Hurtlemere House in all weathers, and the view from it under all aspects of time and season, but she never remembered to have thought the landscape lovelier than it was on this day. The calm rich glow and fulness of August, when summer was greenest in the woods, and the moors had donned their mantle of splendid purple, took away the air of chill desolation from about the lonely old house. In the sun the tarn lay bright and still, glittering like a gem, while the terrace and sloping lawns of the old-fashioned garden were gay with roses, pinks, stocks and other hardy flowers such as ask but little tendance and cultivation. Rachel had brought up with her a book, extracted from her godmamma Grandage's choice shelf, but she could not read it successfully; if she sent her eye travelling along the lines, in due time the foot of the page was reached, but not the sense of a single word had penetrated to her mind; therefore she gave herself up perforce to the luxury of laziness and

meditation, beguiling the time as best she might by inspecting the borders and making discoveries of plants forgotten, or perhaps never noticed before, but continually wending round by the gate to watch if Sunshine and Sinclair were yet a-coming.

She had long to wait—*very* long it seemed to her impatience. One o'clock struck, then two; and leg-tired at last, she retreated to the porch again, and once more appealed to the old book to amuse her, but with no better results than before: then she fell to thinking of Helena, and recalled several sunny hours with her in this very place whence her child had been banished for so many years. Then she drew round to this present time, and her imagination anticipated in a hundred foolish, dramatic, impossible fashions the manner of the meeting that was now so near at hand. Still there was no sign of Alice or her lover. She could not help beginning to wonder then, and to speculate over their delay, hoping it portended no intervention of evil mischance. Thrice did Mary Wray come out to ask if she thought it possible they had changed their minds, but Rachel was positive they would not do *that*. Nevertheless her anxiety increased to a painful pitch, and she could have screamed for joy when at about a quarter before three they actually presented themselves,

Sunshine beaming bright as the day, but Sinclair unusually grave. The sight of Rachel appeared to relieve him; he said he had begun to fear she might have given them up and have gone away; but there had been small risk of that.

“It is a steep climb up-hill, and there are so many beauties to admire by the road that we could not make up for time lost before, so Rachel must forgive us,” said Alice, drawing a long breath; then she stood still gazing round on the prospect with clear, happy, earnest eyes. “It seems half familiar to me,” she added after a pause of leisurely contemplation; and next, in answer to a question of Rachel’s, she began to explain the cause of their tardy arrival. As usual, it was the merest trifles in the world that had procured for her such a tedious interval of waiting and anxiety.

“It was not quite our fault,” said Alice. “Aunt Delia wanted me to hem a missionary-basket petticoat after breakfast, and even Sinclair bade me be obedient to-day, and that kept us until twelve o’clock. Then I incautiously told her that if we found you here, we should spend the afternoon in the woods round about, and not go back until dinner-time. That produced another hindrance—we must not start until after luncheon; so luncheon was ordered

half-an-hour earlier, and here we are at last. But how could you say the Hurtlemere House was wild and desolate, Rachel? I think it is the most romantic and picturesque spot in the dale."

"Not the prettiest or the pleasantest to live in, though," replied Rachel. "It is showing you its best face now, and I am glad you like it."

"*Like it*," said she, and was going to expatiate on its peculiar attractions, when she caught sight of Mary Wray who was looking out of one of the upper windows. Mary drew back when she saw herself observed, but Alice's mood, tone, and manner changed completely. "Rachel, who is that person who was with you yesterday?" she asked in a low voice but with passionate earnestness. "She is here now; I want to speak to her. Let me speak to her. May we go into the house?" She was steadily drawing Rachel towards it all the while, recognition dawning clearer and clearer in her wide-eyed gaze, until near the porch she stopt, and crushing Rachel's wrist painfully hard in her excitement, cried, "Oh, look at that porch, at those steps and the golden moss! Look at those stone seats, Sinclair! I know them all. I have either dreamt this place or I have been here before! Dear Sinclair, let me go in, let me go in!"

"If you will try to be still," said he, and taking both her hands, turned her towards him, looking at her with a pleading, controlling kindness.

"I will not fret if I can help it—I will be good, I will, indeed!" and she smiled over her childlike promise with lips that quivered and eyes glittering through tears. Rachel was no firmer; emotion is catching, but she kept behind the two as they entered the porch where now stood Mistress Dobie, her shrewd old visage twisted up into a knot with suppressed curiosity and feeling.

Alice was too much agitated to notice anything but that she was not "mamsie;" and when the dame said, "You'll mayhap like to walk in wi' your friends, Miss Rachel, an' tak' a rest," it was clear she meant to wait for a recognition. Rachel asked her to show them into the large old dining hall, which she remembered as the room chiefly occupied by Sir Laurence and Gipsy in former days; and when she threw the door wide open, whispered her to send in Mary Wray at once.

Alice stood still as a statue just in the doorway for perhaps the space of half a minute, then uttered a cry of ecstasy that rang again in the hollow, raftered roof. "It is, it is, it is!" she reiterated, her voice mounting higher and higher, and all her

tears vanishing in the supreme moment of joy. "Here is Sir Sumfit and the Ogre, and here are Ye Babes! Oh, Sinclair, dear Sinclair, this is where I lived with papa!" She darted to the fireplace, now filled with summer-green boughs, and began fingering over with tender touch the grotesquely carved heads that ornamented the high oaken mantelpiece, her face kindled with passionate gladness, her breath coming in short, quick, panting gasps.

At that instant entered Mary Wray, who had overheard her voice, trembling and saying, "Oh, my sweet bairn, my blessed bairn, that's what you ca'ed 'em when you only lisped, an' fed 'em wi' biscuit every night that Magsie could hardlings pyke it out o' their jaws i' the morning. Oh, my lile Annis, that I ha' whipt, an' cuddled, an' kissed, an' kissed again, surely you'll knaw *me*? You'll knaw *mamsie*—pretty Mamsie, you did use to say, but I an't pretty now but to my good man at home!"

If Annis knew her! It was touching to witness the rapture of recognition, to see the tears, to hear the broken words in which there was so much meaning and so little verbal sense! Mary felt all a mother's passionate yearning of love over the child, and fondled and caressed her as if she had been a tiny

thing again; stroking her glossy hair, her rosy cheeks, and lifting up her dimpled chin to tell her with tender flattery she was bonnier than the bonniest flower that ever grew; but "like Gipsy every bit of her, an' she should have known her amongst ten thousand!"

Alice was quite carried out of herself for some minutes; but at length she looked slowly round from face to face, and seeing nothing but a glad sympathy in any, asked,

"Where is papa, Sinclair? This was our home, but where is *he*?"

"On his road, Sunshine—you will see him before the day is over, if all be well," replied Sinclair.

"All is well! all shall be well!" cried she, passionately. "Oh, mamsie, press your hand over my heart!" She twisted herself half round as if in physical pain; the exquisite joy touched very close on the borders of anguish.

"Come to the window," interposed Sinclair in his firm, kind, soothing voice; and taking her away from Mary, he made her stand by him quiet and silent, looking out on the hushed afternoon until the oppressive flood of feeling went down. Then, when she was able to bear it, he told her how he had come to know her secret two days before.

"And you did not tell me—ah! it was unkind," said she reproachfully.

"Was it unkind? then you must forgive me, for I meant it to be kind—I kept it that you might not have long to wait; because excitement wears you out, and I cannot bear to see you fret."

Gipsy did not look very implacable; she accepted Sinclair's plea—even tried to interrupt it.

"I am sure you love me," said she, and was therewith content. He then told her how aunt Delia and aunt Flora had been kept in the dark like herself, and how she must endeavour to cheer and comfort them; for if she were making a great gain, they would feel it almost like suffering a loss.

"Dear old auntie Dee!" murmured she, with sudden compunction for many a past and gone bit of rebellion; "I am glad I hemmed that ugly striped Abbeakouta petticoat this morning! I will work nothing but missionary-basket for a month; I will read dull books, and be as good as gold all day that you shall hardly know me!" Then she grew excited again. "I have such an ache at my heart—say it once more, Sinclair, say it once more—I *shall see papa to-day*." Sinclair repeated the assurance with every variety of speech, but even then hardly could he satisfy her ears with hearing it. "Let him not be

long or I shall die!" exclaimed she with strongly repressed emotion, looking up in her lover's face as if he could help her.

Sinclair tried the effect of tender, soothing words upon her, but the sob swelled in her throat and the tears in her eyes, until Mary Wray with practical shrewdness, having mastered her own feelings, introduced herself into the conversation.

"Whisht, my bairn, whisht!" cried she, cheerfully. "Who talks o' dying when a' is just coming bright side up for 'em i' th' world? Main foolish wad it be to die now; just when your father's coming back after he's lived all these years wi' out you. Ha' done wi' fretting an' such nonsense, an' let us talk o' better things nor dying which is t' last an' worst we *can* do."

And so they did talk, Mary sustaining the chief burden of it for the next half hour. But Alice could not be still in one place, and it needed a visible effort to keep down her agitation as she went about the room, holding Sinclair's arm and trying to recognize other old acquaintance in the stags' heads and curious spoils of the chase which still decorated the walls as in former times. But it was only the sculptured faces of the chimney-piece that she was able to remember distinctly; the general aspect of the room

seemed familiar to her but not its details. It had now just the same air of dismal, forlorn emptiness as it wore on that memorable winter afternoon when Oliver Warleigh came to Hurtledale on his first mission.

Alice paused by-and-by on the hearth, and said musingly, as she gazed down on the bare boards: "I wonder what became of all the dogs?"

Mary Wray suggested that perhaps Mistress Dobie could tell; and Mistress Dobie to her fervent delight was summoned, dropt curtsies, and very respectfully acknowledged her master's daughter on Mary's introduction.

"But I don't think as I suld ha' known her in a crowd," said she when appealed to on that point. "When you tell me it's Miss Annis, I see them's her eyes, an' she has a look o' her poor young mother, for all she's not so fair. But it's the *voice* as is most like *her*—oh! but Sir Laurence 'll know it well. He used to say long after she were gone, as he heard her calling to him in that pretty, petted, impatient way she had, 'Laurie, Laurie!' I could ha' believed at odd times I've heard her myself, round about i' the garden o' the long summer nights!"

Alice listened with tearful eyes, and drew a deep quivering breath as Mistress Dobie ceased, but

Sinclair was determined if possible to keep her calm, and quietly set aside tenderer reminiscences by asking the farmer's wife if she could tell what had become of Gipsy's old canine friends. Mistress Dobie, who plumed herself justly on the possession of an excellent memory, needed no second invitation to open out her chronicle of defunct dogs, dating from Annis's babyhood. Considering the ordinary term of dog-life, it was not probable that any should survive which had been the little wildling's playmates, and she was therefore not surprised when the good dame began by saying with a suitable pathetic sigh, "Eh, Miss Annis, I'm thinking they're all dead. There were Cosmo dropt only three year sin' come Martinmas; he was very auld—a black dog, if you mind him, wi' a white breast—a good-natureder beast never lived; an' you tewed him about awful, you did—put him on a nightcap, an' Matt's spectacles, an' a short pipe in his mouth as he was a picter to see; our Magsie'll talk about it to this day she will, laughing and crying together. An' Jet—he were all black an' a bit cross-grained when things didn't suit him, which was pretty oft; an' a terrier as Matt ca'ed Mixty-maxty, but he were properly christened Yapp, for all his noise he made when he were a pup, as he might ha' had three head o' his ain to mak it wi'. An'

t' auld lass Juno—there's a grandson o' hers i' t' yard now, an' another down at the Mill—Lucy's Robb has him; but t' Danish dog's new, an' we an't had t' Roosian retriever long, nor t' Samplong beast as is as big as a donkey, an' o' no use at a' i' this country unless it be to eat us out o' house an' home, an' keep Magsie doing for iver wi' biscuit, and tallow-crap, an' a copperful o' butcher's meat every day." Mistress Dobie's present canine grievances threatened to be long drawn out, and they were still in progress when a sound of wheels was heard to which every ear listened. The dame bustled off, but returned in a minute explaining that it was only Matt coming up the hill with the cart.

Alice bore this marvellously well; just a little sigh escaped her, and then she asked, breaking a pause of painful stillness, if there were not in the house a small, curiously decorated room with many pictures and ornaments on the walls.

"That'll be the bit chapel-place—has my bairn kept memory o' that?" said Mary Wray; and Mistress Dobie added solemnly, "Yes, it's here an' just as it was. Master allus spent in it th' day he married his wife an' the day she died, poor thing. He carries t' key awa wi' him, an' when he comes home he takes me in an' sits by while I rightle it up.

There's her prayer-books an' things he must do himself, they're that holy to him. An' you recollect it, Miss Annis! It was the spot i' all the house your mother loved best; she wer a good young cretur as ever lived she wer, though she might be a papist. It wer i' that faith she'd been brought up; an' I ha' but sma' opinion o' them that changes fra' what they were taught when they were bairns. There's a sight mair conceat i' such fettle folks religion than there was i' t' good auld-fashioned sort o' catechism piety which speaks plain, an' bids us love God an' our neebors; and she did that, she did; she was gentle to t' meanest thing alive—she wadn't harm a worm; an' what was harder to my mind, she forgave them as 'ud never look at her; as treated her worse than the ground under their feet, as darkened her death-bed wi' fear an' sorrow for her bairn, ay' an' robbed her bairn away when she were dead!"

It was of no use now. Mistress Dobie had worked herself up into a state of angry vindictiveness as she recalled her young mistress's wrongs and sufferings, and Alice was infected by the feeling. She began to weep, softly at first, but as her passion gathered strength by its indulgence it quite overpowered her, and swept away all her hardly maintained self-control. She could know nothing of the

real truth, but an impression of deep sorrow inflicted on her mother, innocent as herself, stung her heart, and over that came the dark array of her own childish agonies; until the sense of accumulated pity and pain utterly overwhelmed and crushed her. There she was, kneeling on the floor, her face hidden in Mary's bosom, and Mary's kind arms encircling her, while Sinclair Ferrand stood by helpless and grieved, when unmistakably a carriage drove in at the gate, round to the porch and stopt. But she was past hearing it now, as she was past hearing her Mamsie's soothing and tender, "Whisht, my bairn, whisht!"

It might be about three minutes after when Sir Laurence Warleigh entered the room with Mr. Bond behind him and Mistress Dobie who had hurried off on their arrival, leading the way. "She's here, Sir Laurence, she's here, lile Miss Annis, but she ain't lile any longer as you'll say when you see her!" cried the dame, performing the introduction in her own fashion, which, as it happened, was as good a fashion as any—not erring on the sentimental side at least, and making few words do.

"She is just what I expected—little lasses have a trick of growing up," observed Mr. Bond, chuckling at his own wit.

Sir Laurence spoke not a word, but as Annis rose from her knees, looking up at him wistfully and searchingly, he took her face between his hands and kissed her; then put her off a little way, smiling down into her eyes until the bright light came back to them, and she half sighed, half sobbed: "I know you, papa!"

"And I know my Gipsy too," replied he; "we must give Rachel Withers a pair of spectacles for not having been quick-sighted enough to find her out for me before."

Rachel was taken aback, she thought the remark cruel, but everybody else laughed.

"A vara gradely lass," growled a husky voice at the open door, echoed by a shrill cry of, "Oh, but she's bonnie!" and behold there was Matthew Dobie and Maggie with him, both gaping and jubilant, staring in upon the scene. These sounds awoke Mistress Dobie to a sense of the proprieties, and she immediately whisked herself off, carrying Mary Wray and the others with her.

And in this manner came about the reunion that had been the long hope of Sunshine's heart while all the world was against her. Just, "I know you, papa;" and "I know my Gipsy too!" Nothing could have been quieter, easier, simpler, more natural;

and it was over in a tithe of the time that it has taken to record it.

Alice's countenance cleared, and she kept a loving gaze on her father as did he on her. He was the less changed of the two; twelve years of exile and wandering had not altered his appearance; his hair and beard were grizzled, but he was still in the full vigour of life.

"If I had met you by chance, papa, I should have claimed you," said Alice presently. "We have been once before under the same roof together—that was at Remagen this summer, yet we missed. If you had seen me there, should you have thought I was Gipsy, or should you have gone by without remembering me!"

"I did see you—I saw you with your kind friends coming up from the boat, and again on the balcony in the twilight, but I believed my little wildling to lie buried in Hurtledale churchyard with her mother. She haunted my fancy strangely that night, and in the morning I got away to escape from melancholy. My own darling, we have a world of acquaintance to make over the years we have lost since we said good-bye on the sea-shore at Hastings."

"You are not strange to me, papa," murmured Alice with a soft accent of complaint. "So many

things come back into my mind—you do not remember as well as I do.”

“I remember my Gipsy so high,” levelling his hand considerably below Sunshine’s present height; “first as a shaggy, brown elf, whom no one could break-in to docile behaviour except by petting and infinite patience and love; then trimmed and pruned and primmed into the likeness of a wee quakeress, the picture of precision and demure obedience. That was my last glimpse of my wildling until now that she returns herself on my hands, a tall, well-grown maiden, old as her mother was when I first saw her—my Gipsy evidently, but with a difference.”

Mr. Bond had fully prepared his master for the position of affairs at Prior’s Bank, and retaining his daughter with one arm Sir Laurence now held out his right hand to Sinclair Ferrand, and they exchanged a cordial, heartfelt grasp; friends at first sight. Then Sunshine blushed and smiled saying, “This is Sinclair, papa—I wish auntie Dee and aunt Flora were here. Shall you be too tired to come down to Prior’s Bank and see them this evening?”

“I shall not be too tired to do whatever will most gratify my dear little daughter,” replied Sir

Laurence in a cheerful tone. "I am anxious to see all to whom she and I owe so much."

And then everything went pleasantly, serenely, and happily; there was not incessant talk, but the intervals of silence were as expressive; heart speaking to heart the love, and joy, and gratitude that the lips were too weak to utter.

A pang of self-reproach had flashed across Rachel Withers just at the climax. What right had she to be where she was while Miss Delia, who had been as a mother to the child, was absent? She felt almost vexed at herself for the prominence she had needlessly assumed; and bethought her that the wisest step she could now take would be to go away. By and by Mr. Bond went quietly out, then she followed, and having escaped unobserved made her way swiftly down to Prior's Bank.

As she passed the drawing-room window she saw Miss Delia seated at work in her usual place, with her sister opposite, and the doctor, for a miracle, bearing them company. If he had not prepared them, she thought; and for a little while she stayed outside and gathered a rose or two off the wall, deferring the troublesome moment as long as possible; but when she nerved herself up and entered at last, she found them arranged all in state in their best

caps and silver-silk dresses, prattling very fast and excitedly, but looking as blithe and pretty and happy as it was possible for two old ladies to do.

“Well, Rachel, here you are back again, and a nice manœuvrer *you* are!” exclaimed Miss Delia as she presented herself. “Did you imagine we could not bear good news? and to keep dear Sunshine in the dark as well!—it was *too* bad.”

“I am to be blamed first and Sinclair second, sister Delia,” interposed the doctor. “We advised your being excluded from the secret for the peace’ sake of the household. Perhaps it was rather shabby behaviour, but anything for a quiet life!”

“Anything for a quiet life, indeed! a pretty excuse—but it was shameful!” returned the old lady, half in jest, half in earnest. “Has he come, Rachel? Don’t stand there mute, but tell us, has Sir Laurence Warleigh come, and has he seen his daughter? I shall always *feel* and *say* that it was *my* place to have been at the Hurtlemere House to give her up to him, and not *yours* or Sinclair’s. I am not superannuated *yet*, and who should be so glad as myself that the dear child was right in believing her father to be alive? Nobody loves her better, or would *do* more, or *sacrifice* more for her, I’m sure.”

“We agreed beforehand, sister, not to allude to

this part of the subject," said Miss Flora soothingly. "It is a very happy event, and we will all rejoice in it. Rachel has been a good deal worried lately, and we will not distress her now."

"Far be it from me to distress her, but she is sometimes too clever by half; yes, Rachel, that is your fault, you always like to manage everybody and everything in a way of your own," said Miss Delia, launching at her a glance of tart rebuke.

This was not the first time by many that Rachel had heard people unconsciously attribute their own peculiar virtues to others by way of accusation, therefore she bore her rebuke meekly. But while she was undergoing her lecture, of course the flow of news ceased, and Miss Flora being affectionately impatient to hear all there was to tell, begged her sister to put off her scolding for the present, and to let Rachel speak. And then Rachel entered on a full and particular account of everything that had happened from the moment of Sunshine's arrival with Sinclair at the Hurtlemere House, interrupted only by tender ejaculations of "Poor darling!" and "Bless her dear heart!" until she came to mention that Sir Laurence would walk down that evening to see them, arriving probably with Alice and Sinclair to dinner, when Miss Delia, in an accent of vehement impatience,

exclaimed, "Really, Rachel, I think you have lost your head! Why did you not mention that at first? Flora, dear, I must speak to James," and with sudden hospitable cares on her mind the old lady vanished.

"I advise you to brace up your mind to bear blame from all quarters, Rachel," whispered the doctor, mischievously, when she was gone out of hearing. "I have done wonders for you in the way of pacification, but Delia has not been fairly treated—she has been robbed of conversation." He took a pinch of snuff and offered Rachel another to comfort her, but she declined it with thanks. Then Miss Flora asked if it was dear Sunshine's own suggestion that Sir Laurence should visit them immediately, and being told that it was, she called her a "good little heart!" and went off to communicate to her sister this gratifying fact. As soon as Rachel and the doctor were alone, the doctor gave his companion some details of how he had accomplished his task, and congratulated her on being absent from the house when he undertook it; adding, however, that though his sisters felt rather hurt in their dignity at being kept in ignorance to the last as to what was impending, they did nothing but rejoice in the event itself.

Indeed, Rachel had perceived by their having

donned their most becoming attire that they were treating the day as one of vast pleasantness and importance, altogether worthy to be marked with white; and thereby paying a delicate compliment to Alice, who liked to see them look *nice*, and often fondly objected to aunt Delia's caps garnished with flat ascetic-hued ribbons. She was sure to be pleased when she saw them, for when not purposely disfigured by some unmanageably ugly article of raiment they were as pretty a pair of old ladies as any in England. She liked to tease them by telling them so; for petulant, perverse, wilful as she had oftentimes been by their accusation and her own penitent confession, she loved them as dearly and as fondly as they deserved she should.

Rachel Withers was in her room when Sir Laurence arrived and his meeting with the aunts took place; but a few minutes after Sunshine burst in upon her, exclaiming, "Oh, Rachel, I am too, *too* happy!" She was like an April shower, half mirth, half tears, when she flung her arms round her sober friend as a slight vent to her feelings. "There is papa downstairs, and I wish you had seen him hug auntie Dee! She is in ecstasies, and so is aunt Flora; look, there they are in the garden with him now—Rachel, I know papa as well as if I had only been taken

away from him yesterday, we are not at all shy of each other. I could go on talking to him for ever. But oh, you dear old wicked blind mole, why did you not discover me long ago, and comfort me up when I fell into my cruel moods?"

"I shall collect evidence as to who knew you and who did not—only Mary Wray and your father have done so as yet," retorted Rachel, with feigned vexation; whereupon Alice gave her a vehement embrace, protested she loved her, and acknowledged that it was she who had given her her first crumb of encouragement and comfort; and then as Rachel was dressed for dinner already, her impetuous young companion carried her off to her own sanctum to help her.

"I want to look pretty for papa as well as for Sinclair to-night," said she with a shy laugh at her own innocent vanity. "I should not like him to think me not so nice as his fancy—he hoped I should be like mamma."

The dinner and the evening passed over very happily; there was no stiffness or uncomfortableness by reason of people not understanding each other. Sir Laurence's reception of Sinclair had vouched already for his acquiescence in his daughter's engagement, and removed any irksome doubts that the

young man might have very naturally entertained. He looked gay, and Sunshine at his right hand beamed lovely, while Sir Laurence with his fine bronzed traveller's face seemed quite at ease and at home in his unwonted company. He watched Alice incessantly and with visible delight, and when they were all out on the lawn after dinner, and she was prattling in fond, affectionate, cooing tones to aunt Delia, whom she had taken to petting especially, he laid a caressing hand on her bright head, and said, in a tone of infinite, touching tenderness, "Oh, my little Gipsy, thou hast thy mother's sweet tongue!" Mistress Dobie had recognized the familiar tone in her voice too.

Great excitements are but coldly set forth in words and phrases; but it would be impossible to imagine a happier group of people than those gathered together at Prior's Bank that night. The aunts, as usual, bore a very disproportionate share of the conversation, but no one begrudged it them; the doctor's voice was rarely heard, he took snuff often, and quoted his favourite authors silently. Sinclair and Rachel looked on; Gipsy tried to sing but could not—she broke down in her first ballad, and rushing to Sir Laurence flung herself on her knees beside him, crying, "It is only because I am so glad, papa!"

And for the rest of the evening she was suffered to stay by him in silent enjoyment of her unutterable happiness.

About eleven o'clock he went away, leaving Alice with her aunts until the morrow, and the doctor and Sinclair bore him company in the moonlight half the way back to the Hurltemere House. All the womankind then adjourned to Miss Delia's room, and prattled themselves weary. And so this great day came to an end.

II.

"You need none of you look for Sunshine to-day," was Miss Delia's circular address as she entered the breakfast-room alone on the following morning. The doctor immediately inquired, Why so? and Sinclair echoed the question.

"Because she has gone off to the Hurltemere House to make *quite sure* her father is there," was the answer. "She woke me up this morning before six o'clock with a pathetic plea that she had not slept a wink, and yesterday felt so like a dream, *might* she go and see papa again? I could not refuse her permission, and it would have been of no use if I had, for she was ready dressed for a start. I

only hope she put on her over-shoes or strong boots, because there was a heavy dew and the grass is still wet. She could come to no harm, and her restless feeling is very natural; but, perhaps, you had better go and look after her, Sinclair, when breakfast is over." This Sinclair said he should certainly do, and he expressed a little lover-like disapproval of her having set off across the fields unattended; he would have been ready to go with her at a word of warning.

The elders had a very quiet day down at Prior's Bank without the young folks; for when Sinclair once left them he did not return. John Withers came in for half-an-hour to talk events over; he had been up to the Hurtlemere House already to congratulate Sir Laurence on the restoration of his daughter. Sinclair Ferrand arrived while he was there, and he had left the trio in the porch, all very happy together with two dogs at their feet; Sir Laurence smoking, and Gipsy asking him to tell her about his wanderings, and quite familiar friends already. The aunts missed their capricious Sunshine very much; and all the more, perhaps, because they felt this present absence was only a foretaste of what must by-and-by be the every-day atmosphere at Brookfall; nevertheless Miss Delia, busily stitching at a missionary frock, said in her most amiable way,

“We must not be selfish, sister Flo’—it would have been much the same had our dear girl married Mr. More; what a mercy it is that Providence sometimes sees fit to defeat our best intentions! Mr. More would not have suited Sir Laurence as a son-in-law at all!” Miss Flora cordially acquiesced—she thought it had been quite a *deliverance*.

“You may smile, Rachel; you were right for once,” Miss Delia continued, with an air of cheerful candour; “and it has turned out for the best. But supposing it had *not* done so—life is uncertain, and had anything happened to us, there would she have been left at the mercy of that man who called himself her uncle. As for her having other opportunities of marrying, I am not so sure—men grow scarcer and scarcer every day; I wonder sometimes where they are all gone to. Look what thousands of nice girls are unmarried—Mrs. Wallis declares it is quite melancholy at Knowle, she could tell of fifty on her fingers whom she has watched blushing out at eighteen, and fading down to thirty with never a *chance* of settling. Look at me—I was neither ugly nor penniless, and I never had an offer in my life; there’s Flora, too, she never had but one, and he was only a cousin, and poor papa would not hear of him. And *you* yourself, Rachel, I never heard that any-

body proposed to you but Mr. Gilsland. I know *one* lady, to be sure, who had *fourteen* offers, and the fourteenth was but a crooked stick, though she married him; to be rid of the rest, I suppose, or else because she was afraid he might be the last; but she was uncommonly lovely, and the men ran after her like a flock of sheep. I think it is the prettiest and nicest women who get married, or else it improves a woman to marry her. Sunshine with her beauty *might* have found other lovers had not Sinclair wanted her, but I am sure at Claymire there is nobody possible but Mr. Clarke, and she would never have made a profitable wife to a curate. We none of us have faith enough—we want to lay out the world too far beforehand; if I could have imagined matters would turn out as they have done, what hours of fret and worry I might have spared myself.”

During the afternoon Rachel Withers fell in with Farmer Robb, who said his wife had charged him with a message that she hoped *she* was not forgotten; she had heard the great news about Sir Laurence and his daughter, but she was laid fast at present and could not go up to see Miss Annis; would Miss Annis therefore go down to see her. Rachel promised that she should, and then inquired if Lucy were ill. “No,

she were not exactlings *ill*," the miller cautiously replied; "but she were occupied wi' another babby as she mostlings was now-about. It wer the seventh, an' a vara fine lad th' women told him, but he thought it nobbut small." Rachel ended her walk by paying Lucy a visit, and when her wee whimperer would allow any voice but his own to be heard, she told her about Annis.

"I'm noways surprised she should be living," was Lucy's comment on the story. "It was always suspicious to my mind that Lady Georgiana should be in such a hurry to get Salter out of the way when I was gone; for she was a good nurse, and attached to the children, all of 'em, and not to one more than another: but she was not the body to wink at what was wrong or to lend herself to any bad, underhand doings. Lupton was another sort—I could not abide that woman! She went away as bowld as Hector when it was all found out; Mistress Dobie would have a good riddance of her! She'll come to a bad end, it's in her face. She over high learnt in doctor's wares an' drugs to be a safe nurse, and it's my belief she'd not be particular about mixing something not wholesome in either physic or food for them that stood in her way. All the same, she gave Matthew Dobie a recipe that worked like a charm on his

rheumatics; I got it made up last winter for Robb—he has it bad in his back in damp weather.”

The distrust of Mrs. Lupton was growing universal. Rachel Withers had received a letter from Carrie Martin only that morning in which she mentioned the nurse's return to her own house. When she came to Hurtlemere to attend on Oliver Warleigh she had placed a woman in it, under Dr. Frith's supervision to attend to her lodgers. Carrie had retained her apartments during the interregnum, and still tenanted them, but she was now contemplating an immediate change of quarters.

“I know too much of the beneficent creature's secret history to find her coffee any longer safe or pleasant drinking,” said she, writing in her ironical fashion. “I shall nevertheless regret leaving her; the house is quiet, the neighbourhood retired, and the service respectful, while the domestic confiscations are very trifling—also she makes the best *omelettes soufflées* I ever tasted out of Paris. I think she would be the better for a good hanging, but that is quite between ourselves at present—the public will probably participate in the sentiment by-and-by. Your Hurtledeale romance under the transparent mask of initials has already crept into one of the daily papers; the amiable Mrs. Lupton handed it

to me and pointed out the story; but I flatter myself she did not detect in my open countenance any tokens that I knew her share in it. I asked her if she believed it possible such things could be—*out of a novel*—and smiling in derision at my simplicity, she cried, ‘Ay, possible enough! I have known darker deeds done than that, deeds that bided in the dark too.’ I encouraged her to carry the masked lantern of her talk down into the crypt of her iniquities, and she told me a little narrative of a suicide which would be a capital foundation for a winter’s tale; only for *suicide* I should write *murder* and fix the guilt of it on the phantom representing herself. She is an inveterate boaster, and always betrays an inclination to adopt the first rôle in her melodramas, so that she may not be quite so black as she paints herself. These bad clever women blunder into one fatal mistake—they believe all the world to be fools except themselves.’

III.

The next day Sir Laurence Warleigh moved down to Prior’s Bank to *live* there during the stay of his daughter’s kind benefactresses; it was the easiest and pleasantest way of inuring their minds

to the idea of a brief separation from her by-and-by. Grouse-shooting was just beginning, and he and Sinclair Ferrand were much out on the moors together, when the aunts were left in full enjoyment of their Sunshine as before. She had several pleasant duties of affection to do, such as showing them the Hurtlemere House, which they thought a dismal dungeon, and going with them to visit Lucy. Neither Lucy nor Alice recognized each other, but they spent a long hour together; Lucy telling her old nursling of her mother's life at Everham before her marriage, and of the strange feeling it was to both when they first came into the dales. Alice had a thousand questions to ask of those days, and Lucy as many reminiscences to detail. When Alice went home after this exciting talk she was glad to be still and think it all over in a quiet corner of the garden by herself. The last few days had opened up new depths in her character; she was calmer, gentler, more considerate and yielding to everybody about her. She had got rid of the thorn from her heart which had grievously pricked and pained her while she believed her father to be alive, and others treated the belief as an extravagant delusion.

One day she rode over to Bristowe with Sir

Laurence and Sinclair to be presented to Mrs. Damer Warleigh, who was the only member of her father's family who had known or acknowledged her mother; and the next morning's post brought to the gratified aunts a letter from the excellent old lady. She could not come over to Prior's Bank, said she, for she was very old, weak, and half blind; but she begged them all to visit her at Bristowe before their return to the south, that she might thank them in person for the loving labour they had lavished on her dear Laurence's child, whom she found beautiful and with every sign of goodness and virtue in her countenance. She also expressed her satisfaction that the tie of adoption by which she had been so long bound to her benefactresses was to be strengthened and made permanent by her marriage with their nephew, Sinclair; who, she added, must be worthy of *her* being akin to *them*. The dignified grandame had lost none of her grace or graciousness, and the aunts were touched and delighted by her letter.

There was some suggestion of Sunshine's being taken to Whinstane to visit Lady Foulis in her tower, but this was forestalled by a rather striking coincidence. Rachel Withers while at the rectory had heard from Kester Graves that Effie Benson

had inquired for her several times, and expressed an earnest wish to see her ; but the events that were just then happening had been too absorbing to leave her leisure to gratify the poor old woman's desire. She had now, however, time on her hands, and one morning after a brief call at the rectory, she dropt in at Effie's cottage for a gossip and a longer rest such as the lonely old dame always expected from her. It was wonderful how Effie preserved her faculties and her strength of body still ; she told Rachel that day she was turned of eighty-five. The little house was as neat and clean as possible, every bit of metal about it shining like looking-glass ; and there was Effie seated in her chimney-corner knitting the rector's annual supply of winter socks without even spectacles.

"My mind's been running strangely on Lady Foulis this last day or two," she said, as soon as personal civilities had been exchanged with her visitor.

"Have you seen her since you came into Hurdendale this time, Miss Rachel ?" Rachel replied that she had not, but she hoped to do so before leaving the north again. "Ay, do, an' let me know how she fares, will you ?" added Effie. "I can't get her out o' my head. I think t' Lord's forgotten to call

on her, for she's a good ten years aulder than me. She must be ninety-seven or ninety-eight at the least. I could tell exactlings if I had th' old bible, but Jack carried it away—she was born the same day as him, and he's been dead now going on for sixty years; but what became of th' old bible I don't know—fell into strange hands likelings; th' Lord' give 'em a blessing with it!" She was silent for a few minutes gazing musingly into the embers until Rachel asked her if she knew Lady Foulis when she was young. "Yes, I knew her—everybody about the country knew her when I was a little 'un," was the answer. "My father held a farm under th' auld colonel's father—th' gret squire as we called him—an' awful doings there was up at the tower in th' gret squire's times. She was very bonny but wickeder than she was bonny, and she over the border at last wi' divil Foulis and married him in Scotland. He was a gentleman born, but he'd ruined himself wi' gambling an' wastry, and was no better nor a horse-jock when she took off wi' him. She'd a bad bringing up, she had; but o' th' Sundays in church, I remember when I was a little lass staring at her and thinking surely the angels in heaven must sing like yon. Th' gret squire died about a year after she left him, and then t' auld colonel, but he

was a youngish man then, came into the property. 'Twas t' colonel adopted him as was Sir William after—he was the very moral of divil Foulis when he grew up, but nobody guessed then whose son he was. What got divil Foulis none of us ever heard, but she came back ragged and raving one blazing hot day in the harvest time, and the colonel kept her shut up ever after in the north tower. Dear, how well I remember the talk of it when I was a lass! Folks called her a witch, and every mishap in the dale was laid on her—and oh, the ghost-music she played in the dead o' the night! It gave me the creeps to listen, but oft and oft when mother was in bed have I got up an' opened the window to hear it. They said she grew right of her wits in a year or two, but she never stirred out in the sun any more, and I never saw her face again after the last time I saw her singing i' church. It is like what she was then she keeps running over an' over again in my mind."

It was very remarkable that Rachel Withers just as she was leaving the cottage should meet Matthew Dobie, who stopt her to say,

"Ha' ye heerd, Miss Rachel, as auld Leddy Foulis is dead?"

She turned back at once and told the news to Effie.

“Eh, that’s been it,” responded she; “I was looking for it. The Lord Almighty’s thought on her at last. Christ give her rest to her soul; for she dreed an awful penance if she did murder him as they said.”

The last words were spoken very low, but Rachel caught them. Perhaps they revealed the kernel of that dark mystery which hung so long, and hangs yet, round the north tower at Whinstane. The country-folk say Lady Foulis haunts it dead as she haunted it living, and that the shepherds on the hills at night still hear her eerie ghost-music floating out upon the wind as they used to hear it before her body was laid with her kinsfolk in the vault of Penslaven Church.

In passing by Helena’s grave on her way to the rectory that morning, Rachel had observed that the inscription on the memorial stone commemorative of her child had been carefully erased; and from the trampled appearance of the turf about it she conjectured that the coffin also had been removed. It had. The rector had caused the grave to be opened in the presence of suitable witnesses at daybreak, and the coffin was found to contain what Oliver Warleigh had stated, a mere log of wood swathed in flannel, the whole now crumbling down into

decay. Certainly the conspirators had had great faith in that *somebody* who helped them when they trusted him so far as this, and showed so little fear of the curiosity of those who had loved the child, and who might have been tempted, notwithstanding the fever she was said to have died of, to seek a last glimpse of her darling face!

IV.

After Mrs. Lupton's return to London Dr. Frith had the audacity to write threatening letters to John Withers, to Lady Georgiana, and even to Sir Laurence Warleigh himself, declaring his resolve to publish the whole disgraceful story of Annis's abduction to the world unless he were duly bribed into silence. But no notice was taken of them, and he might make up his mind that he had received his last sixpence of wages for the share he had in that villany. Before she made her exit from the Hurtlemere House, the worthy nurse plundered Lady Georgiana of all her jewelry, ready money, and other portable things of value; she even stript her of clothing down to bare necessities, and with some articles her sisters-in-law had even been obliged to supply her.

Few who saw Lady Georgiana now could help pitying her. She had sunk into a state of apathetic despair; she said Frith might do his worst, for she had nothing left either to hope or to fear. Mortimer had not returned, neither had he written a single line to any one at the rectory since he went away. "He left us without a word, and it is borne in upon my mind that I shall never see him again," she said to Katherine one evening. "He will not hate me—Mortimer never vehemently loved or hated anything, but he will forsake us. I do not expect ever to hear of him more."

He had been gone a fortnight now, and every one was anxious to hear some news of him—perhaps Sir Laurence the most anxious of any. He had not seen Oliver or Oliver's wife; he was not one to go out of his way to crush those who were crushed already; he never even mentioned their names, but of Mortimer he said he would take care; promising to fulfil the expectations in which he had been brought up to the utmost limits of his power. No one who knew Sir Laurence was surprised, but strangers and vindictive persons thought his generosity sheer quixotism. Oliver, since his residence at the rectory, had begun to rally, and Dr. Beane said there was no reason why he should

not recover health and strength and outlive all his betters. He had taken to reading again, a custom for many years abandoned, and seemed even to enjoy his book. Miss Delia Ferrand could not be withheld from sending him a few specimens of her choice literature which the Christian woman esteemed appropriate to his evil, sinful case, but it was not known that he gave them his attention—probably he did not; they were milk for babes.

A few evenings before the party at Prior's Bank broke up there was a large family gathering at dinner there; John Withers and Katherine, Arthur Hill and Grace, Dicky, merry Andrew and Sacharissa Tulip came, the three last on the plea of making cousin Annis's acquaintance. The young people behaved with remarkable discretion, accepting her quite as a person of course, though they had been used to see her name on a grave-stone for a dozen years; but no doubt there was a good deal of speculative discussion about her amongst themselves afterwards. With her they kept to their own favourite topics of general interest; inquiring if she liked dogs and horses, if she could shoot or play cricket, and so forth, and finding they were of one mind on these great subjects they pronounced her "very well for a girl," Sacharissa Tulip leading

the eulogium. To hear that home-bred child of thirteen talk, strangers might have fancied she confused herself with her brothers, and impertinently believed herself their equal in point of sex! Her mamma quite openly deplored her hoydenishness, forgetting that she had been almost as wild at the same age. Rachel, who was her godmother, and therefore directly responsible for her morals and manners, was much less anxious; the child was generously disposed, very brave and truthful; not clever, and thus far not handsome, though she had been a lovely baby. Dicky called her "a good fellow," and so she was. A girl of her kind here and there makes a pleasing variety—Katherine admitted this in theory herself, but regretted that the practical specimen had fallen to her lot. Gipsy fraternized with her rough-girl cousin on the spot, and Sacharissa Tulip immediately fell in love with her, according to the enthusiastic manner of her time of life.

The guests were late in separating, for the hours were shortened by Sir Laurence's delighting the young folks' adventurous spirits with various anecdotes of his travels north, south, east, west—there seemed to be no known country in the world that he had not visited. Alice, who had contrived her-

self a seat close beside him, listened breathless as he told of journeyings through primeval forests, monotonous in a dead silence, unstirred by voice of beast or bird, where the long vistas of road stretched straight between the ranks of giant pines for miles without change, or break, journeyings that lasted for days. She asked if he had seen the Falls of Niagara.

“Yes,” replied he, smiling at her ardent interest in every word that dropt from his lips. “Yes, I have seen the falls. My first sensation was almost one of disappointment, but they grow on the imagination until in their vast power and grandeur they overwhelm it with awe. There is a little vessel, the *Maid of the Mist*, in which if you be a man swathed in waterproof, and if you be a lady, shut up in a sort of glass case, you may go as near the boiling torrent as is pleasant—much nearer, in fact. It is a gallant little boat, and rides the waters like a sea-bird; I relish the sense of *some* dangers, but I was not sorry to be off that dancing foam-sprite, and safe on solid ground again. There were five persons who went under the fall that day besides myself, and the youngest of us, a tall lathy fellow as big as our friend Sinclair here, felt the strain on his nerves so terribly that he cried like a child

when the feat was accomplished. I remained a week at Niagara, and each day the scene was more and more terrifically grand. The morning I left a great raft of timber that had broken from its moorings high up the river went over the falls; it was composed of gigantic forest trees, but when it reappeared a mile or more below it was all broken up like a mere faggot of sticks."

The doctor wished to learn something of the travelling arrangements on the lakes, and Sir Laurence gave him a vivid sketch of a race when he was on board one of the contending steam-boats. They were about ten miles out when the race began, and the excessive density of the smoke from the funnels first warned him of what was going forward. He spoke to the captain, asking if he felt himself justified in thus imperilling the lives of his passengers, but he acknowledged himself utterly powerless over his excited crew. They were all blacks, and on going down into the engine-room Sir Laurence saw them stript to the skin, some smearing great junks of wood with lard and pitch, then thrusting them into the furnace holes to force the fires, while others played with water on the machinery to prevent it becoming red hot. They worked at their task like demons, heedless of danger. The vessel was a new one, very

elegantly but slightly built, and walking on the deck Sir Laurence compared to walking with the undulating motion of a serpent under the feet.

“And what was the end of it?” asked Dicky, who had followed the story with increasing excitement at each novel incident.

“The end of it was that I went ashore at Buffalo,” replied Sir Laurence, “and the race being continued next day the vessel I had left blew up; only fourteen persons being saved out of a crew and passengers numbering a hundred and eleven. They were thirty miles from land, and the survivors were picked up by the rival boat, which was astern.”

Alice shuddered to think of her father's narrow escape, and Miss Flora addressing her nephew, said with great solemnity,

“Let me beg of you, dear Sinclair, when you go to America never on any account to sail in a racing-boat.”

“He might be taken unawares as I was,” remarked Sir Laurence. “But if he accepts my warning he will never engage his passage in any vessel but the mail-packets. They are timed at each station and restricted to a moderate speed; and it is at the captain's peril if he suffer the rules to be infringed.”

Miss Delia in her spirit of universal philanthropy

now wished to hear something of the slaves in the South from an eye-witness, but Sir Laurence had nothing very shocking to tell her—or would not tell it. He thought the system most costly, but had not witnessed any of the desperate cruelties he had read of in books of romance. Miss Delia then proclaimed herself an abolitionist pure and simple—all the slaves free to-morrow! to which Sir Laurence replied with a quotation that “suddenly to abandon the worst of vices was sometimes to entail the worst of consequences.” If the three millions could be provided with free passes to the nearest fixed star, and there encouraged to found a sable republic, her prompt measures might be safe, otherwise he was of opinion that gradual ones would serve the purpose better. She shook her head—a nation ought not to continue in sin a day after its sinfulness was acknowledged—do right and trust to Providence to bring His own good ends out of it. Sir Laurence dropt the argument, and no sooner had he done so than the discursive old lady was off to Central Africa, inquiring into the condition and prospects of her beloved heathen-tribes, and questioning the traveller straightly of his acquaintance amongst the dear missionaries. He went through his catechism with considerable spirit; and with interest to all his hearers; gave the

missionaries high testimony for their courage and faithfulness, but did not express much tenderness for the objects of their endeavours; appearing to feel that if all the savages were civilized off the face of the earth and numbered with extinct races it would be much more comfortable for the decent people left.

He had some hunting adventures to detail of this portion of his wanderings which held his listeners in thrall for ever so long; and Miss Delia remarked thereanent that Claymire would be proud if he would give them a lecture when he went down there, introducing these charming anecdotes into a general account of missionary labours in Western Africa. Poor Sir Laurence looked dismayed at this suggestion, and protested that he was nothing of a public speaker; but the enthusiastic old lady assured him his success would be conspicuous, and only relaxed in her efforts to extract a promise from him when she discovered that he entertained certain views far from orthodox and not at all suitable to be developed before a village audience.

For instance he did not wish to see caste abolished in India until there was something better to replace it, and thought moreover that caste prevailed amongst Christians as well as amongst Hindoos—did they not even go to the Lord's Table in castes? It appeared

to him so. He had no great faith in the conversion of Jews; he thought it was 'once a Jew, always a Jew?' He believed that little progress would be made in Christianizing the heathen until native pastorates were rooted amongst them; and considered that as remnants of pagandom yet survived amongst nations enlightened a thousand and more years ago, so would they continue to survive wherever new religious systems were grafted in; and therefore teachers of the gospel must take wider views of social politics than they seemed commonly inclined to do. And finally he admired the spirit of the Roman Catholic missions as much as any; their priests being simple, devoted men, ready to brave poverty and labour of body in addition to all their other trials as he found few others were.

This silenced Miss Delia for good and all. "Sir Laurence is a brave and generous gentleman, but his views are unsound and unsettled," said she in confidence to her sister afterwards. "He seems to think all faiths equally true and good if their holders be only sincere in their profession. I trust dear little Sunshine will remain firm to her principles. I would rather see the poor heathens left in their gross darkness than enlightened by the torch of Rome!" Miss Flora ventured to demur to this, but Miss Delia

would not hear her. No good could come out of Rome—she had made up her mind to that long ago, and to suggest that any parts of its system might with advantage be restored to Protestantism was as exciting and exasperating to her spirit as the fluttering of a red rag before the eyes of an infuriated bull. Her theories were of the narrowest, but her practical charity of the widest; to hear her harangue she might have been supposed a bigot and persecutor in grain; to see her life, none but must acknowledge her a kind, genuine, well-meaning Christian as ever lived.

Sir Laurence told his daughter he *loved* her; she was *thorough*; and *thorough* people were the only people to be trusted; and when he went to Brookfall, as he did about a fortnight after the aunts returned home, carrying Sunshine with him that they might have a last glimpse of her before she went abroad with him for the winter, he actually delivered that lecture in the school-room at Claymire; hurt nobody's feelings, and was himself complimented. From that evening Miss Delia excused his peculiar views, and was his friend for life; all the faster friend perhaps that she has not yet succeeded in getting him quite converted to her own.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

WEDDING BELLS.

There is a garden in her face,
 Where roses and white lilies grow ;
 A heavenly paradise is that place,
 Wherein all pleasant fruits do grow :
 There cherries grow that none may buy,
 Till cherry-ripe themselves do cry.

RICHARD ALLISON.

I.

THE time of singing birds had come again, and with the singing birds came back its Sunshine to Brookfall. The aunts had had a very quiet cold-feeling winter at Claymire while she was abroad with her father. They arrived last from Penslaven, where Sinclair Ferrand had been staying with them since their return from Italy in March. Penslaven was to be the future home of Sinclair and Annis—Annis as we will now again call her since she has gotten back her kinsfolk and her rights. The lease on which it had been held had expired at Michaelmas, and Sir

Laurence had determined to restore it, and fit it up anew for them. It was a pleasanter place than Whinstane Tower and in every way more desirable as a residence; the country round was richer and less wild, and there were more sociable neighbours near. Whinstane Tower was taken by the people who had hitherto had Penslaven; they were a large family, and wealthy and liberal, and it was thought better for the sake of the village that it should have a tenant than stand any longer empty. Katherine would fain have had Sir Laurence live there himself, but that he said he should never do; the Hurtlemere House would serve him as a retreat between his wanderings as heretofore, and when he was disposed for society the young folks would give him a corner by their hearth at Penslaven.

The destiny of pretty Prior's Bank was not settled yet. There had been a suggestion in the autumn that the Oliver Warleighs should take it and live there, but no conclusion was arrived at. They were still at the rectory, and everybody began to think it time some change was made; for their permanent occupancy of so much of the house prevented the rector and his wife from conveniently entertaining other guests. Of Mortimer there had been received as yet no tidings whatever; every possible effort had

been made to trace him but without success. Long since he must have been penniless, and he was not a young man ready enough either of wit or of hand to achieve sudden independence. On Lady Georgiana the suspense weighed more cruelly than could have done the saddest certainty; she seemed to be punished for her crime with a refinement of the very pains she had remorselessly inflicted.

One day soon after her return to Brookfall Annis fell to talking of Mortimer with Rachel Withers.

“I am sorry for Mortimer because the wrong was one of his doing,” said she. “And papa too is greatly hurt that he should have shown so little trust in him after he had treated him in every respect like a son. He had not much courage or he would have stayed by his father and mother. You fancied once, and so did aunt Delia, that I was in danger of loving him, but it was not really so. I never had any heart but for Sinclair. I was attracted to Mortimer because I felt at first sight that he was a link between me and the past, and any person or thing that promised to clear up the mystery of my childhood had a strong fascination for me. My conscience is clear with regard to him. I know by Sinclair’s love for me that Mortimer never loved me—aunt Katherine doubts it, and I most

earnestly wish, if he be living, that he would return or let us know where he is wandering. He does not remain away because of me, and I dislike the imputation that he should."

"I cannot remember the time when I did not love Sinclair beyond all the world besides," she added by-and-by. "He was rest and refuge to me when I was unhappy, and when I was gay he was my merriest companion. He was never wearied or impatient with me, let me be as capricious as I would. From the night he carried me in his arms to Brookfall, and set me down by the dog in front of the kitchen fire, a little, hungered, beaten, miserable wretch, I have loved him and looked up to him as braver, better and kinder than anybody save papa. So long ago as that, in his ways he reminded me of papa, and since I have seen them together, I think they are in disposition more alike than ever. He loves me faithfully, and I have grown to feel of late that apart from him I should only half live."

They were to be married in June, and the interval Annis was to spend with the aunts while preparations were being made. The good old ladies gave a solemn dinner-party to welcome Sir Laurence and his daughter, to which were invited all the old friends who had hitherto known Annis only as the bright

and bonny Sunshine of Brookfall. She appeared in full-dress with pearls in her hair and on her satiny neck, and everybody said she had bloomed into a more radiant loveliness than ever during her few months of absence. The little airs of dignity and responsibility she was acquiring suited her even more charmingly than her ancient caprices—not that *they* were to be considered as spirited away altogether, but simply that they had retired into the background, and were becoming less exacting.

Everybody seemed to consider it right and delightful that Sunshine should be about to marry Sinclair, and merry little Miss Crispe who was amongst the guests said so expressly.

“It is so pretty of her—just like a fairy tale princess espousing her valiant deliverer from the fiery-eyed dragon,” whispered she to Rachel Withers confidentially. “Since Claymire adopted her it is only just she should choose her prince there. I enjoy a true-love story as much by sympathy as if it were my own. I hope it won’t come in at prayers to-night that this is a wicked, miserable world, for if it should I shall feel in duty bound to groan dissent. Look at those two—it does one’s heart good to see them. Eden itself was not happier than this prettified little drawing-room with them in it.”

Mr. More was invited to the feast but he declined it. He was courting again, and his present flame was Phœbe Wallis, who was seventeen last October; but even she turned up her little nose at him, though her probable alternative would be going out to teach. Mr. More looked too exclusively for youth and beauty, and youth and beauty do not like green spectacles and what Alice called "squeak-leather," in a lover's boots. But he had bought him a chestnut wig of the modern sort undistinguishable from natural hair, and had come out more brisk and gallant than ever since he went wooing to Knowle; and the gossips said that under maternal pressure there was every prospect of Phœbe giving way and becoming Mrs. More.

II.

Sir Laurence Warleigh went and came and did not remain permanently at Brookfall—the quiet discipline of the aunts' establishment being possibly too strict for his vagrant tastes and habits. On one occasion he set off with Sinclair for a few days' ramble along the coast, and in their double absence the time hung rather long on Sunshine's hands. Under these circumstances she bestowed some of her

leisure on Rachel Withers as of old. One morning she came down, to her sober friend's astonishment, in very clouded mood.

"How fast the time flies, how thickly events crowd one upon another," said she taking a seat by the open window and looking out at the spring flowers. "It is April again—last April I was without papa, I was not promised to Sinclair, poor cousin Mortimer was safe and well, and auntie Dee lectured me when I had my *moods*. It is a different world, this that I am living in now, Rachel ; it is one full of happiness and contentment. If I were to set my heart to wish I do not know what more I could desire."

"Then you have but to learn to be thankful," responded Rachel. "A thankful spirit must be as acceptable to the Giver of good as one that has many needs and prays that they may be satisfied."

Annis paused thoughtfully on her words for a moment, and then went on.

"Is it wise to tell each other we must feel this and we ought to feel that? I was expressing my great happiness to auntie Dee this morning, hoping she would rejoice and sympathize with me, but I took her at a wrong moment ; for she chilled it all by bidding me remember how suddenly it might be blasted or

taken utterly away from me. 'In the midst of life we are in death,' she said. It is the manner of her piety, for she is pious, Rachel; she is as genuinely true and good as any woman breathing. I did not need the familiar reminder, and it shocked and pained me inexpressibly. It is her way to dash every sweet cup with a drop of bitter—then I was vexed and sarcastic, and she was grieved and hurt. I am no better than I was for all I am so happy; and I have been haunted ever since with a dread lest papa or Sinclair should not come back to me—lest some accident should befall them. Things as strange and cruel have happened to other women."

"I would not imagine any event so improbable," returned Rachel, surprised but encouragingly. "I would have more trust were I you than to fear lest God should suffer my life to be destroyed just at its best and its brightest."

"But if I am not bearing my blessings as I ought?" she suggested further.

"If you are a faithless, fanciful little goose," was Rachel's irreverent answer; for she saw that tears would be the issue were no check administered to her whimsical disquietudes — disquietudes which she would never have felt had they not been put into her head.

About the middle of May Jane Grantham arrived at Brookfall to officiate as bridesmaid to Annis in conjunction with Rachel Withers' boyish madcap of a god-daughter. They would be a queer contrast those two. Sacharissa Tulip brought with her a new riding-suit; her first regular "all-of-cloth suit," as she apprised her god-mamma, and she was ambitious of wearing it on the solemn occasion; being aware that she appeared to much better advantage in it than in any puffery of muslin or silk or lace. But Annis laughed at her and said, no, she would have none of the riding-habit on her wedding day; her maidens must look maidenly and keep her in countenance by being dressed alike all in white.

Jane Grantham showed like a sort of quakerish dove beside Rachel's hoyden niece. It was her fate to be a governess, but she had not yet had time to take the formal stamp of her order, and was fair, plump, cheerful and serene as if her monotonous working-life suited her to perfection. "I find her a most amiable young person and full of principle—we all like her," Miss Flora said to one of her friends; "but she is *too* retiring; she never speaks unless she be first spoken to, which is *proper* in her situation, I presume, but we could dispense with silence at holiday time; it makes her look shy and dull, and she has

plenty both of sense and conversation when she is alone with us."

Rachel Withers walked up to Brookfall by invitation to inspect the bridal splendours when they came from town, and there she found the three young ones with the aunts and Miss Crispe enjoying the sober pleasures of contemplation each in her own way. Annis stood the centre of an admiring group, submitting herself to the manipulations of the skilful waiting-woman who had been her maid "all to herself" since her change of fortune, while the wedding-dress of richest silk and costliest lace was being fitted on. The aunts were seated in silent dignity of watchfulness, and Jane Grantham leant against the window-sill holding the Brussels veil and crown of myrtle and orange blossoms; Miss Crispe flitted round and round, active and helpful, settling here a plait and there a fold, while Sacharissa Tulip who never could sit down in private like any other young Christian gentlewoman, was perched on the top of a chest of drawers, arrayed in full equestrian costume, her plumed hat in one hand, and her whip in the other, impatient to be off for a promised gallop on the downs with her uncle Laurence, and pretending that the whole ceremony of "trying on" was unnecessary and a bore. Nobody believed her, of course; for to

women worth a chip such ceremonies are perfect enjoyment.

"It will be your turn some day, missikin, and then you will talk quite differently," said Miss Crispe, wagging her head at the scornful chit.

"No, it will never be my turn, for I propose to lead a single life," retorted she. "I shall keep two horses, a big dog, a man and a maid, and be like that celebrated lady called 'Boy in Blue,' who was extant in Moor Murray's time, and the most famous toast in the dales."

"You are forming yourself on a distinguished model then, are you, my dear? We fancied you were perfectly original," said Miss Delia, dryly. Sacharissa Tulip was not very quick, but she detected the slight flavour of sarcasm in the old lady's speech; for she rapped her lips with the gold fox-head of her riding-whip, and made no reply.

"The wonder and admiration of the men is your ambition after all," added Miss Flora, who as strongly as her mildness permitted made a point of discouraging mannish girls. "It is only that you take a longer way round to win them than most women think it worth while to do. And the 'Boy in Blue' was married finally, you know, and had children three or four. I have heard that she was a very peaceable sort

of old woman and took snuff copiously in the later years of her life. You must ask the doctor—he can tell you all about her; for he knew her when he was a boy and we lived in the north.”

Sacharissa Tulip evidently felt this turn of the conversation distasteful; she did not like the degradation of her ideal into a snuffy old grandame; she would have preferred to hear that she died in harness over a hurdle at a steeple-chase, perhaps; at any rate she forsook the feminine society and went off whistling to cover her defeat. Annis was by this time invested in as much of her bridal raiment as she would allow to be put on, and the result having been pronounced from every point of view perfect, the retrograde process commenced and all tongues were set free.

“It is a pity and a shame, yes, I declare it is, that every girl has not your chance of looking beautiful once in her life, Sunshine!” cried Miss Crispe with great energy. “I should like to see you married too, my dear,” addressing Jane; “and perhaps we shall. There is no telling what may happen one of these fine days.”

“There won’t happen a chance for me,” responded Jane, airily. “I have quite made up my mind that it is my vocation to be a good teacher and nothing else

or better. I have had a lucky beginning, and as there is a baby only a year old where I am, I may perhaps have the enviable luck to stay until she is seventeen—and that will make me seven and thirty myself.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” ejaculated Miss Crispe. “I won’t listen to you; nice, soft, fair thing that you are, how dare you talk in that way; I call it perfectly wicked, setting nature at defiance! You will be some good man’s delight yet, I know.”

Jane smiled unmoved, but Miss Flora presently whispered something about Mr. Wilson’s having cast sheep’s eyes on her. “He dined here yesterday, and I shall ask him again. It would be the very thing for them both—pity she has no money; I am not sure he could afford to marry without, but we shall see.”

Miss Wilson had married in February, and since she left him her brother had looked rather forlorn, as if his buttons were not seen after with the domestic punctuality essential to the well-being of a man and a curate. The elderly housekeeper she had provided for him was too old to undertake the responsibility of buttons, and in the end, if he valued his comfort he would have to provide her with a younger substitute—he would have to go far to find a better than Jane Grantham. He was thirty-four, diligent in the

parish work, pleasant-looking, pleasant-mannered and with a fund of quiet good sense. Jane was one-and-twenty and something more than pretty; she had a bright, kind face, a lovely figure, and a capital temper, and was altogether very nice and womanly. They were just the sort of people who thrown together under favourable auspices would take to each other with a beautiful spontaneity. Miss Flora was no advocate for marriages of convenience with trust in Providence for the love coming after, but she believed this would be a very desirable match, and for the first time in her life she turned manœuvrer in endeavouring to bring it about.

III.

About a fortnight before the wedding, Rachel Withers one morning received a letter from her friend Carrie Martin, who had just gone down for a month to a favourite retreat of hers on the Scotch coast. Carrie believed she had come upon traces of Mortimer Warleigh, but if so, they ended in a *grave*—in an unmarked grave in the stranger's nook of a little low-land coast churchyard. When Carrie went down to Frasersburn she lodged in a cottage detached from the village inn, but belonging to the

landlady and under her management. She was friends with the fishermen, with their wives and bairns every one; and here she rusticated cheaply and happily, rubbing off the dust of work, and living almost wholly on the sea and rocks. She had known the place a dozen years, and had visited it almost every summer with one companion as well able to enjoy roughing it as herself; growing at each return more attached to the picturesque beauty of the place, and the kindly simplicity of the people. It was from the landlady at the inn in the course of one of those incident gossips of which Carrie was so fond that she learnt the circumstances that she now wrote in full detail to Rachel.

One Saturday night in the early autumn, when the days first began to draw in, there had come to the inn a young, south-country traveller; the landlady did not like the look of him, and shut the door against him, suspecting that he belonged to a set of tramps who had haunted about the place all summer, committing depredations on hen-roosts and the like; but as she went about the house getting supper ready for her family, her mind troubled her that he looked ill, and *might* be a traveller as he professed, and that if he *were* there was no other inn within three miles or more. So

she opened the door to see if he remained still within hail, and found to her grief and surprise that he had lain down in an open cartshed by the collie-dog, too weary, worn, and dejected to seek any other shelter; the beast though savage enough to most wayfarers had not molested him—a dereliction from his duty which appeared forcibly to have struck her. She exalted her voice and bade the stranger come in, but he did not stir, and being alarmed she called to her son to bring a light, when they found that he was in the death agony. He was carried into the house, and laid gently on a heap of sacking within the glow of the fire; then one lad went for the doctor and another for the minister, and the mother and the lass did their best to stay the fluttering spark of existence with such restoratives as they possessed; but all would not do—“his life’s days were sped.” He passed away about an hour after, never reawaking to consciousness, with a quiet sigh as of one sinking to welcome rest. On the body there was found nothing by which to identify him. His clothing was coarse and ragged, but his hands were soft and white, and had never done a day’s work since he was born. The personal description given of him tallied in most respects with Mortimer; the only discrepancy

was in the colour of their hair; Mortimer's was glossy light brown, thick and waved, the wanderer's was said to have been quite dark.

Rachel Withers mentioned nothing of what she had heard to any one at Brookfall, but sent the letter straight to her brother John, who went to Frasersburn accompanied by Lady Georgiana immediately; but after the amplest investigations they returned to the rectory, having come to the conclusion that the hapless stranger was *not* Mortimer. The same dreary uncertainty as before therefore still continued to hang over his fate. It was a desperate ordeal for his mother to go through.

"If it was not my boy it might have been," she said to Katherine. "If he be not at rest, somewhere in the world my boy may be suffering what that poor soul suffered. It is God's judgment upon me—God's judgment upon me!"

It was strange—no, it was *not* strange—it was simply in harmony with the original warp of his character, but it seems to excuse a thing of which humanity might be ashamed when we say it is *strange* or out of nature; but Oliver Warleigh seemed to feel his position scarcely at all. Of Mortimer he never spoke either tenderly or regretfully. *He* was safe—*he* had no new penalty to

pay ; *he* had escaped from a long, direful captivity to false pretences. The worst was over and *he* was unharmed ; his dreaded tyrant was gone and he was free. The hideous dishonour did not gall him ; he was sensible only of the relief from a haunting terror such as the sins and iniquities of but very few it is to be hoped create for them. He had not seen his injured brother nor expressed a wish to see him ; neither had he said a word tending to prove a wholesome sense of his guilt. Perhaps active repentance was not to be expected from a soul dulled by long continuance in its sin. His health was gradually becoming re-established ; and as pity for his once obtrusive wretchedness grew out of place, his stolid, selfish ease and apathy were sickening to contemplate.

Lady Georgiana's journey to Frasersburn spurred her up to plan a removal from Hurtleale ; she soon after announced a design of going to settle permanently abroad where Roderick would enter some foreign service. Neither John nor Katherine sought to gainsay her resolve—the rectory began to feel that it had borne their burden long enough ; and even under the protection of that roof the guilty pair were not safe from the persecution of their former accomplices. Mrs. Lupton and Dr. Frith would be

thorns in their flesh as long as they lived, and not thorns only, but greedy leeches to keep them perpetually poor in purse. Lady Georgiana had twice satisfied their rapacity since Christmas, and their claim on her thus re-acknowledged was never again likely to be withdrawn. Sir Laurence, though he in a manner subsidized these wretches by every guinea he allowed his brother, told Mr. Bond he had no new orders to give respecting the sum that had been paid to Oliver on Mortimer's account, and it was therefore continued. He was in no humour for paltry revenges; he took his daughter and was thankful; saying that if his brother did not repent of the great wrong he had done him as it was, he would not repent when suffering under a mean punishment. Time and age had mellowed this man who was vindictive as a pagan in his younger days, and he showed it in letting his forgiveness take the most practical and unusual form.

IV.

Wedding-bells are not always joy-bells, but on the day when Sinclair and Sunshine were married everybody allowed there was not the faintest echo of minor in their melody. It was a fine morning—resplendent—and the Brookfall garden with the glow on its crimson, pink and white showers of roses looked in full bridal summer array.

Leaving John and Katherine, Arthur Hill and Grace to follow an hour later, Rachel Withers and her promising god-daughter went up to the cottage betimes; Sacharissa Tulip, in spite of herself, quite gay and girlish in raiment of snow, while the beloved riding-habit was left reposing in dark, heavy folds in the wardrobe.

“I know I look like a silly goose,” said she, as much ashamed and as little at ease in her unaccustomed finery as if she had been Dicky or merry Andrew himself. “My bonnet won’t stick on!” And here she gave it a vicious pull which threatened to sever the union between brim and crown at once.

Rachel was truly thankful to get her safely landed in the Brookfall drawing-room; for she was understood to be responsible for her appearance when her

mamma arrived; they two with aunt Grace's help having dressed her under a flow of lingual derision positively marvellous at her years. She declined doing her duty of assistant at the bride's toilette, so Rachel left her downstairs, defending herself in a spirited way under the sarcasm of her uncle Laurence, who professed to sympathize in her abhorrence of smart clothes; but having got rid of her god-mamma, she employed the interval before the arrival of the guests in visiting a paddock adjoining the garden, where was a nice little colt with its mother. Sir Laurence aided, abetted and accompanied her, and the consequence was that when Katherine next saw her hopeful daughter, she had good reason for saying to Rachel in accents of deep reproach: "Look at that child's bonnet, Rachel; and where *has* she been with the hem of her dress? You promised me to keep an eye upon her!" Whatever Rachel had promised beforehand, she was glad to shut both her eyes to her for the remainder of the day!

Annis was nearly ready when Rachel went up to her room, and though not conversationally disposed she was nevertheless as blithe and as smiling as a bride should be on the crowning day of her life. The aunts looked a good deal excited as was only natural.

"You are come then, dear Rachel?" cried Miss Delia, greeting her with a gush of feeling. "The day is here at last that takes our Sunshine from us, and we are all wishing it well over."

"Don't say that, sister, when it is our own Sinclair who wins her. Young folks should marry, and we have everything to be thankful for—and we *are* thankful," said Miss Flora, taking her invariable line of thought.

"I shall be very happy, auntie Dee, and we shall soon see you again," murmured Annis, caressing her benefactress.

"I am not so sure of that when once you take wing," was the old lady's pathetic rejoinder. "I would not undertake to predict your return under three or four years at the shortest. These children are going into Switzerland first, Rachel; then into Italy, and they talk about the Isles of Greece, and Egypt, and Syria, and if they wander off there it will have to be a long whistle indeed, my dear, that will bring them back. *Happy*, of course, you will be happy with Sinclair and your father; who doubts it? And with pyramids to climb, and risks to run, and a general picnic sort of life on camels and asses as they travel in those countries, you will be in what you used to call 'a state of beatitude,' but it will be very

dull often at Brookfall—it will be like November all the year round.”

“No, no, Delia dear, there will be frequent letters,” interrupted Miss Flora with gentle remonstrance.

“And mind you write long ones, and full of details—don’t think any incident too trifling to amuse us!” added Miss Delia,

“I will write just as I should talk if I were with you—half a volume a day,” replied Annis gaily.

While they were thus exchanging last words as it were, Hawkins was packing into a small travelling trunk some of the bride’s most needful belongings, and she was superintending the process between whiles and giving directions.

“It is my fear, auntie Dee, that Sinclair intends to lose our large luggage at the first opportunity, and I know when papa joins us he will never let us carry about those great imperials that are standing in the hall,” said she, exciting a spur of alarm in the old lady’s temper with a view of suppressing more sentimental emotions; but Mrs. Crofts, her own maid, interposed with a solemn assurance that *she* understood travelling, and that she would take good care that nothing went astray that was under

her charge, which assurance mitigated Miss Delia's anxiety.

"Lose your luggage, Sunshine, you had not need lose your luggage!" cried the old lady. "Consider all those elegant dresses, and your lovely pearls, and emeralds, and diamonds! Not but that a simple flower in your hair is quite as pretty, but jewels *are* jewels! Lose them, indeed! But I can trust Mrs. Crofts—she is a responsible person and will look after you."

This setting off into the world of "the children" seemed as critical an event to Miss Delia as her baby's first step alone is to a mother. She had a thousand doubts of how her protégée would get on without her watchful eye.

Annis was standing fully attired, a vision of beauty and delight, when there come a knock at the door, and Grace and Katherine entered; then there was a little fuss in the old nursery adjoining, and that was Sir Laurence and Sinclair, who, Miss Delia said, according to etiquette, had no right to be there; but as he *was* there, he might have just one glimpse of his Sunshine. Sinclair, in his way, looked as well as she did, his aunts thought.

After the ordinary amount of bustle the party started to church. All the village had turned out to

see. The school-girls, according to immemorial custom, scattered flowers in the bride's path, and the boys took up posts of vantage ready to cheer the "weddingers" when they issued forth again. The doctor was to marry the young couple, not assisted by anybody, and when they entered the church, he was in his place, robed and ready. The sun was pouring through the chancel window like a glory, and as it fell on the two heads bowed reverently before the altar, the witnesses accepted it, one and all, for an omen of good, and a token of blessing.

It was soon over, and everybody on the way back to Brookfall again. Sacharissa Tulip's free and easy comments on the chief actors in the ceremony made on the homeward drive, were eminently characteristic.

"Sinclair Ferrand behaved *well*, I will say that for him," she began. "It is so silly of a man to be nervous when he is getting married—that is the bride's prerogative; but he looked as cool, determined and self-possessed as if he were going to take a *rasper* out hunting. When Mr. Simmonds was married to Blanche Fielding, he stood all the while on one leg like a meditative fowl—so absurd! and as everybody *said* it was too late to be meditating *then*. Cousin Annis was very nice too, but I did not expect to see tears in her eyes,—but they looked pretty for

her, so therefore it did not matter. As they are so desperately fond, I suppose they liked to get married, but for the other people it is not half such good fun as a picnic or a riding party!"

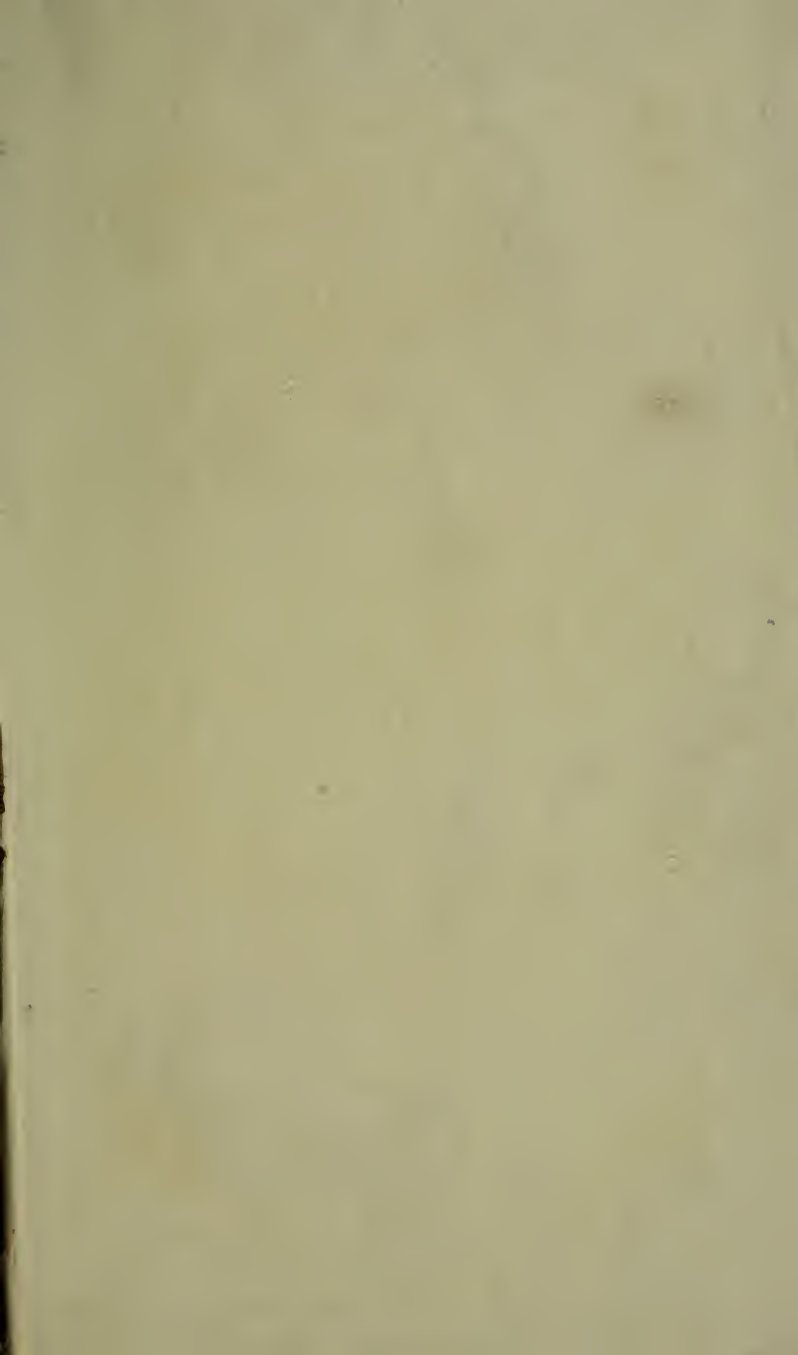
No—the day altogether disappointed the young Amazon. There was the solemnity of the breakfast during which, not being hungry, she had nothing to do but to keep critical watch over Sinclair, who was not betrayed into any awkwardness, and did not even trip or stumble in his little speech of thanks for congratulation. It was all monotonously easy. But there was the setting off, and the showers of old satin shoes to throw after the departing pair for luck; this was her little opportunity; one of them sent the postilion's hat flying; she clapt her hands at her successful aim, and that was her solitary triumph—the one bright spot in her day—knocking off the postilion's hat.

The dinner in the evening was a very quiet celebration, all the wedding guests having left after the breakfast except the members of the two families and Mr. Wilson, who stayed for his own and Jane Grantham's sake. The dear old aunts went through the excitement splendidly, and when the friends who had remained were finally wishing them good-night and good comfort, and committing them to the care

of Sir Laurence, Miss Delia said with profound fervour and simple truth—"It has been the happiest day of my life, my dears!" and Miss Flora for once entirely agreed with her. It was a day marked with chalk to all concerned.

THE END.

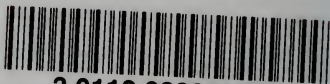
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